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Information/Action

Educator Preparation Committee

Additional Information About CBEST Test-Takers and Recommended Statutory Actions Related to the Basic Skills Exam

Executive Summary: This agenda item responds to Commissioner feedback on the August 2026 Agenda Item 3D, Update on Plans for Commission-Approved Examinations and Consideration of New Exam Options and presents additional information related to the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST). Specifically, the item provides details about who has taken the CBEST in recent years and clarifies proposed changes to Education Code related to the CBEST.

Recommended Action: Review the additional information provided and direct staff to pursue legislative changes related to the basic skills exam.

Presenter: Juliet Michelsen Wahleithner, Director, Division of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

Strategic Plan Goal

Professional Licensure

- **Goal 5.** Educators are appropriately licensed based on the preparation they completed and the services they will provide.
    L. Conduct regular reviews of licensing examinations and assessments to maintain validity and reliability

Additional Information About CBEST Test-Takers and Recommended Statutory Actions Related to the Basic Skills Exam

Introduction

In August 2026, staff presented Agenda Item 3D: Update on Plans for Commission-Approved Examinations and Consideration of New Exam Options. The item included details about current administrations of the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST), including an update on which individuals are required to take the exam and the number of individuals who took the exam in recent years, along with a recommendation to seek legislative action to eliminate the CBEST and allow for the adoption of existing basic skills examinations. Commissioners provided feedback to staff and directed staff to return with additional information.

This agenda item provides both an overview of the feedback given to staff, along with the requested information. The item also clarifies the rationale for the request for legislative action related to the basic skills exam and proposes a set of actions to take related to the exam.

Feedback from Commission

Education Code 44252(b) states that, "The commission shall not issue initially a credential, permit, certificate, or renewal of an emergency credential to a person to serve in the public schools unless the person has demonstrated proficiency in **basic** reading, writing, and mathematics **skills** in the English language as provided in Section 44252.5 or 44252.7." Traditionally, candidates met this Basic Skills Requirement (BSR) by successfully passing the CBEST, the basic skills exam developed by the Commission for the purpose of assessing candidates' basic skills and administered by Evaluation Services (Pearson).

In 2024, Governor Newsom signed SB 153, which amended Education Code section 44252(b) to include the provision that "An applicant who has obtained a baccalaureate degree or higher degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education" meets the BSR. As all but four credentials issued by the Commission require a bachelor's degree, this amendment essentially eliminated the need for the vast majority of prospective teachers to take and pass the CBEST.

Yet, while just 1,271 individuals were issued one of the four credentials for which an individual could potentially need the CBEST in 2024-25, data from Evaluation Systems showed that 5,472 unique individuals completed one or more sections of the CBEST that year. Many of these individuals took one or more sections of the CBEST multiple times. As presented in August 2026 agenda item 3D and in Tables 1 and 2 below, 13,501 individuals took all three CBEST subsections in one sitting, while another 5093 completed the reading portion, 5306 completed the mathematics portion, and 4916 completed the writing portion.

Commissioners requested that additional research be done to determine who might be taking the CBEST and why as well as whether or not preparation programs are continuing to request applicants complete the CBEST as an application requirement.

Table 1. Credentials Issued in 2024-25 Areas That Do Not Require a Bachelor's Degree

Credential Type	**Number Issued in 2024-25**
Emergency Substitute Teaching Permits for Prospective Teachers	1199
Exchange Certificated Employee Credentials	0
Sojourn Certificated Employee Credential	3
Designated Subjects Supervision and Coordination Credentials	69
Total	**1271**

Table 2. CBEST Administrations in 2024-25 (An individual may have taken one or more sections multiple times)

CBEST Sub-Section	**Administrations**
All Three Sub-Sections in a Single Session	13501
Reading	5093
Mathematics	5306
Writing	4916

Included within the August 2026 agenda item was the proposal that Commissioners direct staff to pursue statutory change that would enable the use of one or more nationally available basic skills tests to meet the BSR for credential candidates who do not hold a bachelor's degree. Commissioners requested clarification regarding the statutory changes staff were proposing and the rational for those proposed changes.

Who is Taking the CBEST

As discussed above, in 2024-25, it appears that significantly more individuals took the CBEST than may have been required to do so for a credential. More recent data provided from Evaluation Systems shows that the number of individuals who take the CBEST annually continues to slowly decline. In 2025-26, 5122 unique individuals completed one or more sections, but this number is still greater than the number of credentials issued in 2024-25 that could potentially require the CBEST.

One concern expressed by Commissioners was that some educator preparation programs may still be requiring applicants to submit CBEST scores to verify they had met the BSR. To learn more about which programs might still be requiring the CBEST, staff worked with Evaluation Systems to find out where individuals who took the CBEST requested their scores be sent. Of the 5,122 unique test-takers in 2025-26, 2,988 CBEST test-takers requested having their scores sent to 137 different institutions. While 99 of these are California educator preparation programs (EPPs), an additional 33 are California community colleges and five are out-of-state institutions. Of the 99 California EPPs, nine had 50 or more test-takers request their scores be sent to them. Staff reviewed the preliminary teaching credential program admissions

requirements for each of these nine and found that none indicated the CBEST was required. Additionally, 2,134 CBEST test-takers did not request their scores be sent to any institution.

To better understand who may be taking the CBEST and why, staff reviewed Education Code to determine if a basic skills exam might be listed in sections other than those that apply to preliminary teaching credentials. This review led to Education Code 45330, which establishes the requirements for paraprofessionals. Specifically, 45330(c) states that individuals employed as paraprofessionals must demonstrate one of the following: completion of at least two years of study at an institution of higher education, completion of an Associate's degree, or: "(3) Through a local or state assessment, that is appropriate to the responsibilities to be assigned to the paraprofessional, knowledge of, and ability to assist in, instructing reading, writing, and mathematics." Indeed, when reviewing the paraprofessional application requirements for a random selection of California school districts, CBEST was included as an option for verifying knowledge of basic skills.

These findings suggest that, while some individuals may be taking the CBEST to fulfill the requirements for one of the four credentials the Commission issues that do not required a bachelor's degree, the vast majority of individuals who take the exam are likely doing so for a purpose other than to fulfill the BSR for admission to a teacher preparation program.

Clarification of Proposed Legislative Change

As stated above, Agenda Item 3D: Update on Plans for Commission-Approved Examinations and Consideration of New Exam Options also included the recommendation that the Commission direct staff to pursue statutory changes to eliminate the requirement that the Commission administer a California-specific basic skills examination. Commissioners expressed concern with the ambiguous nature of this recommendation and requested that staff clarify what change would be recommended and what the intended outcome of that change would be.

Education Code 44252.5(a) states that, "The commission shall administer the state basic skills proficiency test pursuant to Sections 44227, 44252, and 44830 in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the commission. A fee shall be charged to individuals being tested to cover the costs of the test, including the costs of developing, administering, and grading the test. The amount of the fee shall be established by the commission to recover the cost of examination administration and development pursuant to Section 44235.3."

Staff recommend pursuing a revision of Education Code 44252, 44252.5(a) and related code sections that would allow the Commission to approve the use of a basic skills exam pursuant to sections 44227, 44252, and 44830, while retaining authority to develop and administer a state-specific exam. Pursuing this change would provide additional flexibility by allowing the Commission to adopt one or more existing basic skills examinations for use in California and/or update and maintain the CBEST.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommend the Commission direct staff to pursue legislative action to change Education Code to allow the Commission to approve the use of a basic skills exam pursuant to sections

44227, 44252, and 44830, and/or continue to maintain a California-specific basic skills proficiency exam.

Next Steps
If directed to do so, staff will work with the Legislature to propose a change to existing Education Code sections 44252 and 44252.5(a), as described above.

If the proposed change is made, staff would then return to the Commission to consider adopting an existing basic skills assessment, with the provision that California passing standards be established, and sunsetting the CBEST.