
3E

Action

Educator Preparation Committee

Adoption of a Minimum Passing Score Standard for the Foundations of Reading Examination

Executive Summary: This agenda item describes the process used to identify a valid and appropriate minimum passing standard for California credential candidates taking the newly adopted Foundations of Reading examination and presents a recommended minimum passing score standard for potential adoption by the Commission.

Recommended Action: That the Commission adopt one of the proposed minimum passing score standards.

Presenter: Mike Taylor, Consultant, Professional Services Division

Strategic Plan Goal

Educator Preparation and Advancement

- **Goal 1.** Educator preparation programs hold candidates to high standards and adequately prepare them to support all students by using culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining practices in equitable, inclusive and safe environments.

Adoption of a Minimum Passing Score Standard for the Foundations of Reading Examination

Introduction

This agenda item describes the standard setting review workshop for the Foundations of Reading examination and provides a recommended minimum passing score standard for the examination based on the recommendations from the California Standard Setting Panel.

Background

At its June 2023 meeting, the Commission adopted a [transition plan](#) from the Reading Competence Instruction Assessment (RICA) to the new Literacy Performance Assessment (LPA) that is being field tested this academic year. As part of the transition plan from the RICA to the LPA, staff provided [notice](#) to program sponsors and candidates that, consistent with the provisions of the applicable statute, both the RICA: Written and the RICA: Video Performance Assessment would be retired as of June 30, 2025.

Two candidate groups will be particularly affected by the time frame for transitioning to the new LPA as of June 30, 2025:

- A. Teachers who earned a Preliminary Multiple Subject or Education Specialist credential during the pandemic who were given a deferral for the RICA requirement because testing centers were closed or had limited capacity.
- B. Currently enrolled Multiple Subject and Education Specialist candidates who will have completed all other credential requirements except for passing the RICA or the LPA pilot by June 30, 2025. The Commission does not have data on the number of current candidates enrolled in teacher preparation programs in the current academic year who are required to pass RICA this year. These candidates will have a limited amount of time compared with previous candidate cohorts to attempt and pass the RICA before it is retired.

These two groups of candidates need a way to meet the reading instruction competency requirement even after RICA is retired. In addition, examinees who are prepared out of the country and others who are not enrolled in a Commission-approved teacher preparation program will need an ongoing way to meet the reading instruction competency requirement.

Commission Adoption of the Foundations of Reading Examination

The Commission took action at the [August 2024](#) meeting to adopt the [Foundations of Reading](#) examination as an assessment individuals could use to meet the reading instruction competence requirement after RICA is retired in June 2025. With Commission approval of the Foundations of Reading examination (see below), previously enrolled individuals who have yet to pass the RICA beginning July 1, 2025, will have two options to satisfy the reading instruction

competency requirement: passing a Literacy Performance Assessment (LPA) or passing the Foundations of Reading examination.

The Foundations of Reading examination, which is currently required in thirteen states, meets the requirements in [Education Code section 44259\(b\)\(4\)\(A\)](#) except for item v below, guided clinical practice in a clinical setting, which cannot be directly measured by a written examination but is required to be completed within the preparation program.

- i. The study of organized, systematic, explicit skills including phonemic awareness, direct, systematic, explicit phonics, and decoding skills,
- ii. A strong literature, language, and comprehension component with a balance of oral and written language,
- iii. Ongoing diagnostic techniques that inform teaching and assessment,
- iv. Early intervention techniques, and
- v. Guided practice in a clinical setting.

In addition, this examination meets the definition of “direct, systematic, explicit phonics” in paragraph B of [Education Code section 44259\(b\)\(4\)](#) and assesses integrated methods of teaching language arts as required in paragraph C of the Education Code.

Foundations of Reading Examination Structure

The Foundations of Reading examination contains both multiple-choice and constructed-response questions.

Table 1: Test Structure for Foundations of Reading (Standard Setting Form)

Content Subarea	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Constructed-Response Questions
I. Foundations of Reading Development	44	0
II. Development of Reading Comprehension	34	0
III. Reading Assessment and Instruction	22	0
IV. Integration of Knowledge and Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foundational Reading Skills• Reading Comprehension	0	2
TOTAL	100	2

The Standard Setting Process

“Standard setting” is the common term used in the large-scale assessment industry to describe the process of determining a minimum passing score, or cut score, for new or revised examinations. The term “standard” as it is used in standard setting refers to a performance standard or minimum level of acceptable performance on an examination.

For criterion-referenced examinations like the Foundations of Reading, standard setting is a content-focused, structured process in which a panel of content area experts review the content of an examination, and carefully consider the knowledge and skills being measured and relevant data such as question difficulty levels and potential pass rates for various cut scores to make an informed judgment about the minimum level of content knowledge that examinees should demonstrate to “pass” the examination. The standard setting process results in a recommended cut score from the content expert panel to the Commission, which has the authority to establish the minimum passing standard for the California educator credentialing examinations.

Standard setting is a common and established process for determining valid and defensible minimum passing scores for standardized examinations. Standard setting allows an authoritative body, in this case the Commission, to make an informed decision when establishing cut scores instead of arbitrarily selecting a minimum passing standard.

There have been many different methods for standard setting published and researched in the field of large-scale assessment over the last 60 years. These standard setting methods are in use today for various types of assessments all over the world. All of the most common standard setting methods for educational assessments involve the informed judgments of “raters,” or content area experts. The specific standard setting process used for the Foundations of Reading is described more fully below.

The Foundations of Reading California Standard Setting Study – February 2025

The purpose of standard setting studies is to provide the Commission with recommendations, based on the informed judgments of California educators, relevant to the determination of the initial passing standards (in this case, for the Foundations of Reading examination). The educators on the Standard Setting Panel represented credentialed TK-12 teachers with experience teaching children to read, district-level administrators, and teacher preparation program faculty with experience in elementary education or special education who are responsible for the preparation of multiple subject and special education teachers.

As with the standard setting study method used for all other Commission examinations, the process employed for the Foundations of Reading examination was consistent with recognized psychometric principles and procedures. The standard setting study workshop for the Foundations of Reading examination was conducted on February 25 and 26, 2025.

The standard setting workshop began with an orientation and training session. The initial step was to ask the panel members to independently take the examination under simulated test-like conditions. This activity helped the members become familiar with the examination, the

knowledge and skills associated with the items, and the perspective of the examinees. The panel members were then familiarized with the content domains and objectives measured by the exam and the concept of the minimally competent level of content knowledge necessary for a beginning teacher. Panel members were asked to conceptualize the specific content knowledge and skills of a hypothetical beginning teacher who would be competent in the subject area. Panel members used this concept of what a minimally competent beginning teacher would know and be able to do in determining their recommended acceptable score for passing each subtest. Although a number of examinees may exceed the level of acceptable knowledge and skills, none receiving a passing score should fall below this minimally competent level. The panel also reviewed the performance characteristics and score scales used to evaluate the constructed-response items in the Foundations of Reading examination. After this extensive training and the simulated test taking, panel members completed the following two rounds of standard setting activities, as described below. These activities focused on arriving at an informed judgment as to what the potential cut score should be that reflects the minimum level of subject matter knowledge necessary for a beginning practitioner just competent to begin professional practice.

Round One: For each multiple-choice item, the panel members were asked to independently rate the percent of minimally competent beginning teachers whom they think would likely answer the item correctly. For each constructed-response item, members were asked to independently indicate the level of response that would likely be achieved by the minimally competent beginning teacher.

Round Two: The Round One ratings, which were displayed anonymously, were distributed, and members discussed the reasoning used in making their determinations. The second round moved the panel from individual item ratings to ratings at the section level (i.e., multiple-choice section and constructed-response section). They were asked the number of multiple-choice items that would be answered correctly and the total score points that would likely be achieved on the constructed-response items by the minimally competent beginning teacher.

Separate ratings for each of the subtests were made during each of the rounds. The panel's recommendation represents the computed median of the second round results.

Demographic information about the panelists who participated in the February 2025 standard setting study workshops can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Results of the Standard Setting Studies

The Standard Setting Panels followed the procedures outlined above to determine a recommendation for the Foundations of Reading minimum passing score. Following the standard setting study, the Commission's contractor calculated the median panel-recommended passing score based on the individual members' recommendations. Table 2 below provides a summary of the Foundations of Reading standard setting panel recommendations, including the number of scorable items by item type, the total possible score by item type, and the median panel-recommended raw score total.

Table 2: Foundations of Reading Panel-Recommended Passing Score Standards

Subarea(s)	Item Type	Total Possible Raw Score Points	Panel-Recommended Cut Score
I, II, III	Multiple Choice	85	58
IV	Constructed Response	16	11

Impact Data

The standard setting panel reviewed some data about the potential impact of their recommendations on passing rates for examinees. Table 3 below shows the impact data the standard setting panel was shown based on their recommended minimum passing standard for the Foundations of Reading examination. The impact data shown to the standard setting panel and included in Table 3 is based on a national sample of first-time examinees who took the Foundations of Reading examination between August 23, 2021 and May 1, 2022 in states that had already adopted the Foundations of Reading examination for use in teacher credentialing. The impact data provided to the standard setting panel and included in Table 3 is not based on California examinees and does not include any California examinees.

Table 3: Number of Individuals who Completed Foundations of Reading with Potential Passing Rates at the Panel-Recommended Passing Score Standard 08/23/21 – 05/01/22 (Not California Examinees)

Gender/Ethnicity	Number of Examinees (N)	Percent of N passing at Panel Recommended Cut Score
All Examinees	2,251	56
Male	176	45
Female	2,052	57
African American / Black (not of Hispanic origin)	203	29
American Indian/Alaska Native	10	20
Asian/PI/ Pacific Islander	29	34
Hispanic	107	50
White (not of Hispanic origin)	1,798	60
Multiracial	45	64
Other	30	33
Undeclared	29	62

Standard Error of Measurement

Once the final panel score recommendation is determined, an additional modification may be made to that score before it is adopted by the Commission. This modification is the determination and potential application of an adjustment that takes into consideration the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM). The SEM is a key measurement concept that addresses how accurately the recommended passing score standard reflects the scores likely to be achieved by actual candidates in real-world testing situations. For example, an examinee takes the test one time and receives a score. If that same examinee were to take the same exam several times, with no change in his or her level of knowledge and preparation, it is possible that some of the resulting scores would be slightly higher or slightly lower than the score initially achieved by the examinee the first time he or she took the examination. Given this variation in possible scores on the same test by the same examinee, the examinee's initial score might not reflect the best score that examinee would hypothetically be able to achieve based on his or her actual knowledge and ability in the content area.

The range of scores an examinee would achieve across multiple administrations of the same test, were this activity to take place, includes what is known as the examinee's "true" score (the hypothetical score that would best reflect the examinee's actual ability) and the "observed score" (the actual score received on the first test administration).

A simple way to look at the concept of the SEM is to consider the case of the examinee who takes an examination one time. Many factors affect how the examinee scores on his or her first attempt on the test, including knowledge of the content tested, affective factors such as the examinee's emotional, physical, and/or mental state on that particular day and time, and external factors such as the testing environment. Thus, it is not possible to say with certainty that the score obtained on the initial test taken by the examinee most accurately reflects his or her true level of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The likelihood that the examinee's true score is reflected on his or her first attempt is unknown. Thus, a computed SEM is often applied to adjust the minimum passing score for an examination in order to account for the difference in the examinee's true score and the examinee's observed score on the assessment.

To account for the difference measurement error may create between examinees' observed scores and true scores the Commission may wish to consider applying an (SEM) adjustment to the panel-recommended minimum passing standard for each of the subtests in both examinations.

Table 4 below shows the potential pass rates for the population of examinees based on different SEM adjustments. The number of individuals who took the exam between August 23, 2021 and May 1, 2022 in states that had already adopted the Foundations of Reading examination is shown in the first column.

Table 4 shows potential subtest-level and overall pass rates at -2, -1.5, -1, -0.5, and 0 SEM. Subgroups with at least ten examinees are included in Table 4. The last row in Table 4 shows the scaled score value for each SEM increment based on the national scale for Foundations of Reading, which ranges from 100 to 300.

Table 4: Foundations of Reading Potential Pass Rates with Application of Different SEM Adjustments (Not California Examinees)

Gender/Ethnicity	Number of Examinees 08/23/21 – 05/01/22	Passing at -2 SEM	Passing at -1.5 SEM	Passing at -1 SEM	Passing at -0.5 SEM	Passing at Panel- Recommended Cut Score (0 SEM)
All Examinees	2,251	76	73	68	63	56
Male	176	67	64	60	54	45
Female	2,052	77	74	69	64	57
African American / Black (not of Hispanic origin)	203	55	51	45	37	29
American Indian/Alaska Native	10	50	50	40	20	20
Asian/PI/ Pacific Islander	29	69	66	52	45	34
Hispanic	107	74	67	62	58	50
White (not of Hispanic origin)	1,798	80	76	72	67	60
Multiracial	45	80	78	76	71	64
Other	30	57	50	40	40	33
Undeclared	29	76	76	76	72	62
Scaled Score Value on National Scale	NA	224	228	233	237	244

The fact that the sample of examinees used to calculate the impact data does not include any California credential candidates makes it difficult to generalize the impact data included in Table 4 to any future population of California test takers. This is particularly true because this will be a new exam in California. As with any new criterion-referenced assessments it is expected that the pass rates will increase over time as the population of potential examinees becomes familiar with the subject matter measured by the examination.

A Note on Testing Bias

In large-scale assessment, differential passing rates by subgroups are not considered biased in and of themselves. Commission examinations are designed, in part, to uncover differences in

scores according to various subgroups, particularly groups based on race and ethnicity, to help understand gaps in education among the population of candidates coming into teacher preparation. Processes to avoid bias are built into the Commission's examination development and administration processes, including a Bias Review Committee which reviews all test content and questions for potential bias, making changes, suggestions, and even eliminating questions if necessary, and differential item functioning (DIF) analysis, which more deeply compares question-level responses of members of various subgroups to flag for potential bias after test administration. The Commission employs these procedures specifically to reduce measurement error that might be caused by bias so that results by gender, race, and ethnicity can be accurately reported.

Staff Recommendation

Because this examination is new for California credential candidates, staff recommends that the Commission consider and discuss the application of the various SEM adjustments outlined in Table 4 and adopt the panel recommended minimum passing standard with the application of whichever SEM adjustment the Commission feels is appropriate.

Next Steps

If the Commission adopts passing score standards for the Foundations of Reading examination, notification will be posted on the California Educator Credentialing Assessments website and distributed to the field. In addition, future examinees' scores will be calculated based on the adopted passing standard and scaled to the appropriate value on the national scale. The passing standard adopted by the Commission will be applied to all administrations of the Foundations of Reading examination for California credential candidates beginning July 1, 2025.

Appendix A

Demographics of Standard Setting Panel February 2025

Total Number of Participants	12
African American or Black	
Asian American	
Filipino	
Southeast Asian American	
Pacific Island American	
Mexican American / Chicano	
Latin American / Other Hispanic	2
Native American	
White (non-Hispanic)	7
Other Race or Ethnicity	2
Decline to State Ethnicity	1
Female	12
Male	
Nonbinary	
Decline to State Gender	
Public School Educator	10
College/University Educator	2
Other Profession	