

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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State Board of Education Delays Consequences of California High School Exit Exam Decision postpones exit exam as graduation requirement to class of 2006

SACRAMENTO – The State Board of Education today unanimously voted to delay the California High School Exit Exam as a requirement of graduation for two years.

The action means students in the classes of 2004 and 2005 are no longer required to pass the exit exam as a condition of earning a high school diploma. Instead, the class of 2006 will be the first class that must pass the exit exam as a requirement of graduation.

The State Board delayed the exit exam in the wake of a recent independent external evaluation that found the test has been a “major factor” in boosting standards-based instruction and learning but that many students, for different reasons, may not have benefited from courses of initial and remedial instruction to master the required standards.

“Since its inception in 1999, the California High School Exit Exam has proven to be an important indicator of student achievement and a catalyst for positive, major educational improvement in schools statewide,” said State Board President Reed Hastings. “Despite the real progress that has taken place, we want to give our reforms more time to work for more students before requiring the exit exam as a condition of high school graduation.”

Hastings said the exit exam remains a working part of the daily reality of every high school in California and would continue to be a catalyst for raising standards. He emphasized that the law does not allow the State Board to delay the exit exam again.

“The exit exam is here to stay,” Hastings declared. “It will remain in place as an important gauge of student achievement and as a means of identifying and eradicating educational disparities. Our mantra must be educate, remediate and educate some more.”

The State Board directed that local school districts may award a special certificate of accomplishment to students in the classes of 2004 and 2005 who have already passed both portions of the exit exam, which tests English-language arts and math. In addition, the State Board directed that districts may administer and score a secured version of the current exit exam to students who still want the opportunity to pass the test, even though the exam is no longer a requirement of graduation for them as members of the classes of 2004 and 2005.

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Finally, the State Board requested that the next biennial report the exit exam, which is due February 1, 2004, concentrate on the progress schools are making in implementing standards-based instruction.

In separate action later Wednesday, the State Board voted to reduce the exit exam from three days to two by requiring only one essay instead of two on the English-arts portion of the test.

Hastings encouraged local school districts to continue to improve their remedial programs and to sustain the momentum that has made the exit exam a major catalyst for improving instruction at high schools throughout the state, as reported in an independent evaluation conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) of Alexandria, Va. In its report released May 1, HumRRO found that the exit exam has been a major factor leading to dramatically increased coverage of the California Content Standards at both the high school and middle school levels.

The HumRRO report also noted that “the effectiveness of standards-based instruction will improve for each succeeding class of 2004” and that students in the class of 2006 and beyond “are receiving considerably more benefit from the adoption of textbooks aligned to the standards and of professional development efforts for teachers.”

To boost remediation in core subjects, the Davis administration over the past four years has provided a total of \$1.5 billion for supplemental instruction for after-school, intercession, Saturday and summer school programs. These programs have served approximately 1 million K-12 students each year. In addition, \$36 million has been provided to districts to run intensive 7th and 8th grade math academies – funding that was over and above supplemental instruction. Governor Davis’ current budget proposal provides \$351 million in funding for supplemental instruction and \$3.6 million for the 7th and 8th grade math academies.

The California Department of Education (CDE) will send notices to school districts to inform them of the State Board’s action and to outline a new exit exam testing schedule. It is expected that the first opportunity for members of the class of 2006 to take the exit exam will be in February 2004.

School officials also are being reminded that the exit exam will continue to be used in calculating the Academic Performance Index, the statewide ranking of schools, and for accountability purposes in demonstrating Adequate Yearly Progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

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