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Assembly of the Academic Senate
Academic Council
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
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May 1, 2007

SYSTEM-WIDE SENATE COMMITTEE CHAIRS
DIVISIONAL SENATE CHAIRS

RE: System-wide Senate Review of the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates Proposed Resolution on the Proper Use of the California High School Exit Exam

Dear System-wide Senate Committee and Divisional Senate Chairs:

On behalf of Chair Oakley, the above document is being forwarded for your review and comments. As background information, the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) is an organization consisting of representatives from the three segments of public higher education in California. The UC Academic Senate is currently represented by Academic Council Chair John Oakley, Academic Council Vice Chair Michael Brown, BOARS Chair Mark Rashid, UCEP Chair Richard Weiss, and UCOPE Chair John Eggers. This year, Council Vice Chair Brown serves as ICAS Chair, a position that rotates among the three segments each year. ICAS deals with a variety of issues of mutual concern, such as the Master Plan for Higher Education, transfer, articulation, general education, and educational quality and standards. The recommendations of ICAS are made to the Academic Senates of each of the segments. ICAS has only advisory powers to the Senates and other intersegmental bodies, and has no direct way to implement higher education policy.

During its April 10, 2007, meeting, ICAS considered a resolution on the proper use of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The CAHSEE is a high stakes, single-score exam currently used to decide whether a California public high school student receives a diploma and graduates high school or not. The proposed resolution is an opportunity for the three higher education segments of California to opine on its proper use.¹

¹ The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ELA part addresses state content standards through grade ten. In reading, this includes vocabulary, decoding, comprehension, and analysis of information and literary texts. In writing, this covers writing strategies, applications, and the conventions of English (e.g. grammar, spelling, and punctuation). The mathematics part of the CAHSEE addresses state standards in grades six and seven and Algebra I. The exam includes statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra. Students are also asked to demonstrate a strong foundation in computation and arithmetic, including working with decimals, fractions, and percents. The CAHSEE requirement can be satisfied by passing the exam or, for students with disabilities, receiving a local waiver pursuant to Education Code Section 60851(c), or receiving an exemption pursuant to Education Code sections 60852.3 or 60852.4.

The proposed resolution is a statement of educational principles. It addresses what factors should determine a student's ability to graduate high school and how that decision should be reached. As such, coming from each of the public higher education segments in California, the resolution may prompt those in authority to re-examine the law mandating how the CAHSEE is currently being used and study the requirement's educational impact. It does not, however, question whether the CAHSEE is an appropriate test. Neither does it suggest that the CAHSEE should not be used, nor does it direct or require anyone to take a specific action in response.

ICAS agreed at its April 10 meeting that the proposed resolution should be sent out for review by the three segments. Accordingly, after discussion at its April 25, 2007, meeting, the Academic Council unanimously approved the proposed ICAS resolution to be distributed for systemwide Senate review.

In order for the Academic Council to finalize its position this academic year, we would we would very much appreciate **receiving responses from both Systemwide Senate Committees and Divisions by no later than June 13, 2007:**

Please note that we normally have a different deadline for comments from Systemwide Senate Committees and from Divisions, but due to the tight deadline **all responses are due by June 13, 2007.**

As a reminder to System-wide Senate Committee Chairs, request for comments, are sent out to all System-wide Senate Chairs. Each Chair/committee may decide whether or not to opine. Please notify the Senate Office either directly by emailing me or through your Committee Analyst, if your committee chooses not to participate in this review.

Cordially,



María Bertero-Barceló, Executive Director
Academic Senate

Encl: [1 \(Proposed Resolution on CAHSEE\)](#)

Copy: Academic Council Chair John Oakley
Divisional Senate Directors
Academic Senate Committee Analysts

Draft Resolution for the Proper Use of the California High School Exit Exam

Whereas:

1. As part of the State's school reform efforts, students must receive passing scores on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to graduate from high school and receive a diploma, even if they passed all of their classes;
2. It is important to have both effective and proper school accountability systems to promote educational achievement and to close the achievement gap;
3. The achievement gap is based on individual and school performance behavior;
4. Students should be held accountable or rewarded, not for the poor performance of the schools that they were required to or able to attend, but for their own performance behavior;
5. Fixed, minimum thresholds on any particular performance criterion like the CAHSEE are inherently arbitrary, are difficult to justify on an educational basis, and should be avoided;
6. Most of the twenty states that have an exit exam requirement allow their students to demonstrate proficiency through alternative or more comprehensive means (e.g., other tests, course grades, culminating projects, portfolios, etc.);
7. The stakes for students are dangerously high in terms of depressed earnings and lowered earnings potential, especially for the underrepresented and the disadvantaged;
8. Schools where large numbers of students have not passed the CAHSEE are also schools with poor learning conditions (i.e., fewer qualified teachers, overcrowding, and reduced time for instruction); and
9. Study is needed to answer many questions around the high school exit exam program including whether the pass rate on the CAHSEE is being properly calculated and whether the test requirement is causing undesirable and unintended outcomes (e.g., dropping out, failure to amass appropriate credits for graduation or CSU/UC eligibility, academic frustration, teaching to the test, UC/CSU ineligibility, etc.),

Therefore:

1. The Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) recommends that a proper use of scores on the CAHSEE is to target those schools demonstrating lower pass rates for investment with the resources necessary to raise quality;
2. ICAS also recommends that a proper use of the scores is to counsel those students not passing CAHSEE of the value of improving their competencies and of how they might do so (such as making use of the community colleges);
3. ICAS recommends that the scores on the CAHSEE should not be used as either the sole or major determinant of high school graduation or the awarding of diplomas until questions about the impact of the exit exam program are answered – it is imprudent and potentially harmful to students to do otherwise.

Program Overview

Overview of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).

Purpose and Content

The primary purpose of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) is to significantly improve pupil achievement in public high schools and to ensure that pupils who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The CAHSEE helps identify students who are not developing skills that are essential for life after high school and encourages districts to give these students the attention and resources needed to help them achieve these skills during their high school years. All California public school students must satisfy the CAHSEE requirement, as well as all other state and local requirements, in order to receive a high school diploma. The CAHSEE requirement can be satisfied by passing the exam or, for students with disabilities, receiving a local waiver pursuant to Education Code Section 60851(c), or receiving an exemption pursuant to Education Code sections 60852.3 or 60852.4.

The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ELA part addresses state content standards through grade ten. In reading, this includes vocabulary, decoding, comprehension, and analysis of information and literary texts. In writing, this covers writing strategies, applications, and the conventions of English (e.g. grammar, spelling, and punctuation). The mathematics part of the CAHSEE addresses state standards in grades six and seven and Algebra I. The exam includes statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra. Students are also asked to demonstrate a strong foundation in computation and arithmetic, including working with decimals, fractions, and percents.

Background

After determining that local proficiency standards established pursuant to *Education Code* Section 51215 (repealed January 1, 2000) were generally set below a high school level and were not consistent with the state's content standards, the Legislature indicated its intent to set higher standards for high school graduation. In proposing the CAHSEE, the Legislature's primary goal was to "...significantly improve pupil achievement in high school and to ensure that pupils who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics..." (Senate Bill 2, Section 1[b]). Education Code Section 60850 (Chapter 1, statutes of 1999-2000, S.B.2, O'Connell) authorized the CAHSEE to be developed in accordance with State Board of Education (SBE)-adopted content standards in language arts and mathematics. The CAHSEE was developed based on recommendations of the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel, whose members were appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and approved by the SBE.

State law requires that the CAHSEE be administered only on the dates designated by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Students must retake the examination until the ELA and mathematics parts are passed; however, students may retake only those parts not previously passed. All students are required to take the CAHSEE for the first time in grade ten. Students who do not pass one or both parts of the CAHSEE in grade ten may take the parts not passed up to two times per school year in grade eleven and up to three times per school year in grade twelve. Adult students may take the parts not passed up to three times per school year.

The CAHSEE was offered for the first time in spring 2001 (March and May) to volunteer ninth graders (class of 2004). In October 2001, Assembly Bill 1609 (Calderon) removed the option for ninth graders to take the CAHSEE beginning with the 2002 administration. The CAHSEE was next administered in spring 2002 to all tenth graders who had not passed it during the spring 2001 administration. It has since been administered several times to the remaining students in the class of 2004 who have not yet passed one or both parts (i.e., ELA and mathematics). The class of 2005 took the CAHSEE for the first time in spring 2003. In July 2003, the SBE took action to move the passage of the CAHSEE as a diploma requirement to the Class of 2006. The Class of 2006 took the CAHSEE for the first time as tenth graders in February 2004.

In addition to the use of the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement, the spring CAHSEE administration will continue to be used in calculating the Academic Performance Index for state accountability purposes and Adequate Yearly Progress to meet federal No Child Left Behind requirements.

Independent Evaluations

Education Code Section 60855 required the California Department of Education (CDE) to contract for an independent evaluation of the CAHSEE beginning in January 2000. Each evaluation report must include the following: (1) analysis of pupil performance, broken down by grade level, gender, race or ethnicity, and portion of the exam, including any trends that

become apparent over time, (2) an analysis of the exam's effects, if any, on college attendance, pupil retention, graduation, and dropout rates, including an analysis of these effects on the subgroups described in (1) above, and (3) an analysis of whether the exam is likely to have, or has, differential effects, whether beneficial or detrimental, on the subgroups described in (1) above. The evaluation reports must include recommendations to improve the quality, fairness, validity, and reliability of the CAHSEE. The first report of the independent evaluation was completed and presented to the CDE, SBE, Legislature, Governor, and other control agencies on July 1, 2000. Subsequent evaluation reports are due to these same parties by February 1 of every even-numbered year. These reports are posted on this Web site.

Questions: CAHSEE Office | [Write CAHSEE](#) | 916-445-9449

California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) Questions and Answers

What is the CAHSEE?

State law, enacted in 1999, authorized the development of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), which students in California public schools would have to pass to earn a high school diploma. All California public school students must satisfy the CAHSEE requirement, as well as all other state and local requirements, in order to receive a high school diploma. The CAHSEE requirement can be satisfied by passing the exam or, for students with disabilities, receiving a local waiver pursuant to *Education Code* Section 60851(c), or receiving an exemption pursuant to *Education Code* Section 60852.3.

The purpose of the CAHSEE is to improve student achievement in high school and to help ensure that students who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics.

What subjects does the CAHSEE cover?

The CAHSEE is divided into two parts: English-language arts and mathematics. Test questions address California content standards that a High School Exit Examination Standards Panel, appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, determined students should know to graduate from high school.

English-Language Arts

One part of the CAHSEE addresses state English-language arts (ELA) content standards through grade ten. The ELA part of the exam, which consists of multiple-choice questions and a writing task, has a reading section and a writing section. The reading section covers vocabulary, informational reading, and literary reading. This section includes 50 percent literary texts and 50 percent informational texts. The writing section covers writing strategies, applications, and conventions. In addition to the multiple-choice questions, students are asked to complete one writing task on a specific topic or in response to a literary or informational passage.

Mathematics

The other part of the CAHSEE addresses state mathematics content standards. It includes statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, algebra and functions, mathematical reasoning, and Algebra I. Students must demonstrate computational skills and a foundation in arithmetic, including working with decimals, fractions, and percentages. The math part of the exam is composed entirely of multiple-choice questions.

The CAHSEE blueprints provide more information on the content of the exam. The CAHSEE blueprints are available on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/admin.asp>.

Are there any exemptions or waivers of the requirement to pass the CAHSEE?

For certain students with disabilities, an exemption or waiver of the CAHSEE requirement may be available.

Education Code Section 60852.3 provides an exemption of the requirement to pass the CAHSEE for students with disabilities scheduled to receive a 2006 diploma on or before December 31, 2006 if the following conditions are met:

1. The student has an individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan.
2. According to the IEP or Section 504 Plan, which is dated on or before July 1, 2005, the student is scheduled to receive a high school diploma with an anticipated graduation from high school in 2006.
3. The local educational agency certifies that the student has satisfied or will satisfy all other state and local requirements for the receipt of a high school diploma in 2006.
4. The student has attempted to pass the CAHSEE at least twice after grade ten, including at least once during grade twelve, with the accommodations or modifications, if any, specified in his or her IEP or Section 504 Plan.
5. Either (A) the student has received remedial or supplemental instruction focused on the CAHSEE either through the school of the student, private tutoring, or other means, or (B) the school district or state special school failed to provide the student with the opportunity to receive that remedial or supplemental instruction.
6. If the student received remedial or supplemental instruction, the student has taken the CAHSEE at least once following the receipt of that remedial or supplemental instruction.
7. The student, or the parent or legal guardian of the student if the student is a minor, has acknowledged in writing that the student is entitled to receive free appropriate public education up to and including the academic year during which the student reaches age 22, or until the student receives a high school diploma, whichever event occurs first.

Education Code Section 60851(c) permits local school boards to grant a waiver of the CAHSEE requirement to students with disabilities who take the CAHSEE using modifications and receive the equivalent of a passing score.

At the request of the student's parent or guardian, a school principal must submit to the local school governing board a request for a waiver of the requirement to pass the part(s) of the CAHSEE on which a modification was used and the equivalent of a passing score was earned. For the local board to waive the CAHSEE requirement, the principal must certify that the student has met the

following conditions:

1. An IEP or Section 504 Plan is in place that requires the accommodations or modifications to be provided to the student when taking the CAHSEE.
2. The student has either satisfactorily completed or is in progress towards completing high school level curriculum sufficient to have attained the skills and knowledge otherwise needed to pass the CAHSEE.
3. The student has an individual score report showing that the student has received the equivalent of a passing score on the CAHSEE while using a modification.

What is done to assist students with disabilities when taking the CAHSEE?

Students with disabilities must be allowed to take the CAHSEE with any accommodations and/or modifications specified in their IEP or Section 504 Plan for use on the CAHSEE, standardized testing, or for use during classroom instruction and assessment. An accommodation is a change in the testing environment or process that does not alter what the CAHSEE measures or affect the comparability of scores, whereas a modification is a change that fundamentally alters what the CAHSEE measures or affects the comparability of scores.

Students who use an accommodation and earn a score of 350 or higher have passed that part of the CAHSEE. Students who use a modification and earn the equivalent of a passing score on one or both parts of the CAHSEE have not passed but may be eligible for a waiver of the CAHSEE requirement (as described above).

What is done to assist English learners when taking the CAHSEE?

English learners must be permitted to take the CAHSEE with certain test variations if used regularly in the classroom. For example, if regularly used in the classroom, English learners must be permitted to hear the test directions in their primary language or use a translation glossary.

Students who are English learners are required to take the CAHSEE in grade ten with all other grade ten students. During their first 24 months in a California school, English learners are to receive six months of instruction in reading, writing, and comprehension in English (*Education Code* Section 60852). During this time, they are still required to take the CAHSEE.

When do parents and guardians receive their student's CAHSEE results?

About eight weeks after each administration of the exam, school districts receive two copies of the CAHSEE Student and Parent Report for each student who took the examination. When school districts receive these reports, they are to immediately distribute one copy to parents and guardians and place the other copy in the student's permanent record.

In order to pass the CAHSEE, a scale score of 350 or higher is required on each

part. Students do not need to pass both parts of the CAHSEE during the same administration in order to satisfy the CAHSEE requirement. Students who do not pass one or both parts of the CAHSEE in grade ten will have additional opportunities to take the CAHSEE in grade eleven and yet again in grade twelve, if needed.

Do parents and guardians need to keep a copy of their student’s results?

Yes. It is important that parents and guardians keep a copy of the student report for their own records. The CDE does not keep a copy of individual student reports. Individual student scores are to be maintained by the student’s school district. The school district must ensure the records are maintained confidentially. (See *Education Code* Section 49073 and Title 20 United States Code Section 1232[g].)

How many opportunities do students have to pass the CAHSEE?

All students are required to take the CAHSEE for the first time in grade ten. Students who do not pass one or both parts of the CAHSEE in grade ten have up to two opportunities in grade eleven and up to three opportunities in grade twelve to retake the part(s) of the exam not yet passed. The CAHSEE testing schedule through the 2007–08 school year is posted on the Internet at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/admin.asp>. School districts select their testing dates from this schedule.

What happens if students do not pass the CAHSEE?

School districts are required to provide additional instruction to assist students who do not pass the exam. Parents and guardians are encouraged to contact their student’s school for information on the programs offered.

Is the CAHSEE used for school and school district accountability purposes?

Yes. The state and federal governments use the CAHSEE as a measure of school and school district accountability. The state accountability program is the Public Schools Accountability Act, and the federal accountability program is the No Child Left Behind Act. The use of CAHSEE results for these accountability programs in no way affects how the CAHSEE is used for individual student accountability.

How can parents and guardians get their questions answered about the CAHSEE?

Additional CAHSEE information is posted on the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/>. If parents and guardians have additional questions, they should direct their questions to their student’s teachers or contact the school principal or counselor.



MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS:

CAHSEE Results, Opportunity to Learn, & the Class of 2006

John Rogers, Jennifer Jellison Holme, David Silver





MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS: CAHSEE Results, Opportunity to Learn, & the Class of 2006

John Rogers, Jennifer Jellison Holme, David Silver

UCLA's IDEA¹

California's Class of 2006 is the first group of students required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in order to receive a diploma. CAHSEE asks students to show what they know by answering 72 multiple-choice English-language arts questions, completing 1 writing task, and answering 80 multiple-choice questions in mathematics. Students who get 60% correct on the English test and 44% in math by the end of their senior year get diplomas. The rest do not, even if they have passed all of their classes.

Although 20 states currently have an exit exam requirement, most allow students to demonstrate their proficiency through other means (other standardized tests or assessments, course grades and passage, culminating projects, portfolios of work, etc.) if they fail the test. No students are granted diplomas unless they meet clear standards. Because California has only a single measure of student proficiency, it is one of only eight states that automatically denies diplomas to students who fail the paper-and-pencil exam.² The stakes for students are very high: students lacking diplomas are 75% more likely to be unemployed and are estimated to have 30% lower lifetime earnings than students with diplomas. These impacts are most severe for students of color.³

This report presents new analyses of CAHSEE data released by the California Department of Education (CDE) on August 15, 2005 and other publicly available data about California schools. Section I shows striking connections between student performance on the CAHSEE and the resources and opportunities their schools provide. The schools where large numbers of students have not passed the CAHSEE are also schools with fewer qualified teachers, overcrowding, and multi-track schedules that limit learning time. Section II demonstrates that the CDE over-estimates the percentage of students who have passed either the ELA or mathematics portion of the exam by using a formula that excludes students who are more likely to fail the exam. The CDE leaves out of its formula more than 40,000 students who either dropped out during the 10th or 11th grade, or stayed enrolled but did not re-take the exam in the spring of 2005. Using a more accurate calculation based on the actual number in the Class of 2006 who, as 10th graders, were required to take the exam, we found that state-wide pass rates declined from 88% to 80% on the mathematics section, and from 88% to 81% on the English-language arts section. More than 60% of special education students and 40% of English Learners have not passed at least one of the tests. A smaller, but unknown, percentage of students (between 60-79%) have actually passed both tests and are eligible for a diploma. These pass rates would be lower if the calculation included all of the 9th graders from 2003. Section III raises important questions that cannot be answered by existing publicly available data, including the actual number of diplomas that will be denied to students due to the CAHSEE requirement, the impact of the CAHSEE on dropout rates, and the relationship between passing rates on the CAHSEE and school conditions. These questions must be answered before the full impact of the exam can be understood.

I. CAHSEE Results and Educational Resources: Have Failing Students Had a Meaningful Opportunity to Learn?

The CAHSEE data released by the CDE on August 15, 2005 about the graduating Class of 2006, when analyzed together with other publicly available data about California schools, reveal alarming connections between student performance and the resources and opportunities students are provided by their schools.

We divided the state's comprehensive high schools into three groups, based on their students' performance on CAHSEE. We used 10th grade California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) enrollment for the Class of 2006 (2003-04 school year) for each of these schools to calculate these pass rates, for reasons we explain in the second section of the report. The categories we generated based on this analysis are as follows:

Low Pass Rate Schools (LPR): 257 schools where less than 70% have passed *either* the ELA or Math section. These schools enrolled 103,013 10th graders, 22.9% of the state total.

High Pass Rate Schools (HPR): 222 schools where more than 90% have passed *both* the ELA or Math section. These schools enrolled 101,698 10th graders, 22.7% of the state total

Schools in Between: 587 schools with pass rates between 70-90%. These schools enrolled 233,209 10th graders, 54.4% of the state total.

The opportunities to learn in **Low Pass Rate (LPR)** and **High Pass Rate (HPR)** schools differ dramatically. Data from California's Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) about these schools reveal substantial differences in such basic conditions and resources as school overcrowding, availability of qualified teachers, whether math courses are taught by teachers who are certified to teach math, and whether the school qualifies for relief under the *Williams* settlement.⁴

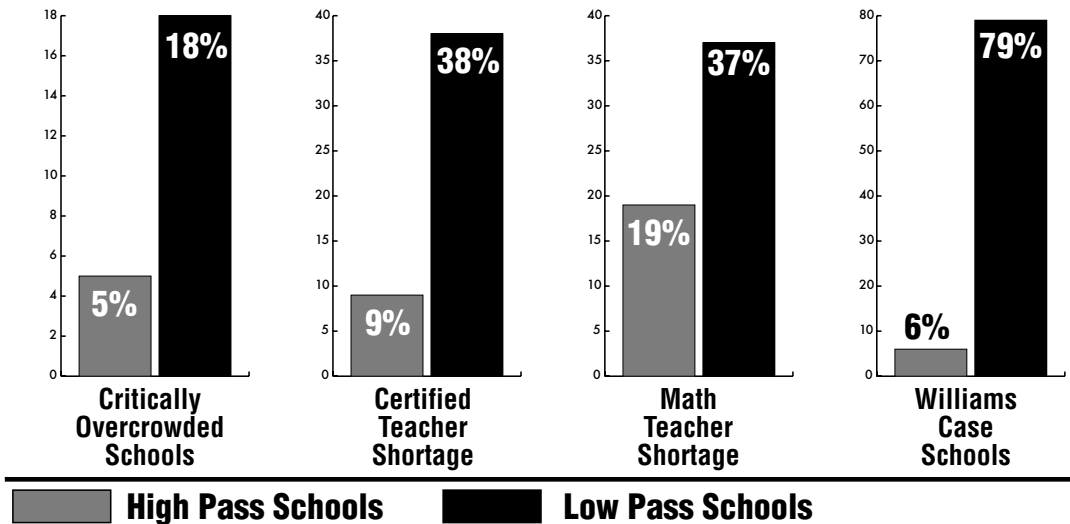
Our data show that the 257 **LPR** schools are:

- 3 times more likely to be critically overcrowded than **HPR** schools (and more likely to be year-round multi-track schools—0% of **HPR** schools vs. 6% of **LPR** schools.)
- 4 times more likely to have critical shortages of fully credentialed teachers.
- 2 times more likely to have at least 50% of math classes taught by teachers who are not certified to teach mathematics.
- 13 times more likely to be eligible for relief for substandard conditions under the settlement of *Williams v. California*



Figure 1

Percentage of SCHOOLS with the following Opportunity Problems:

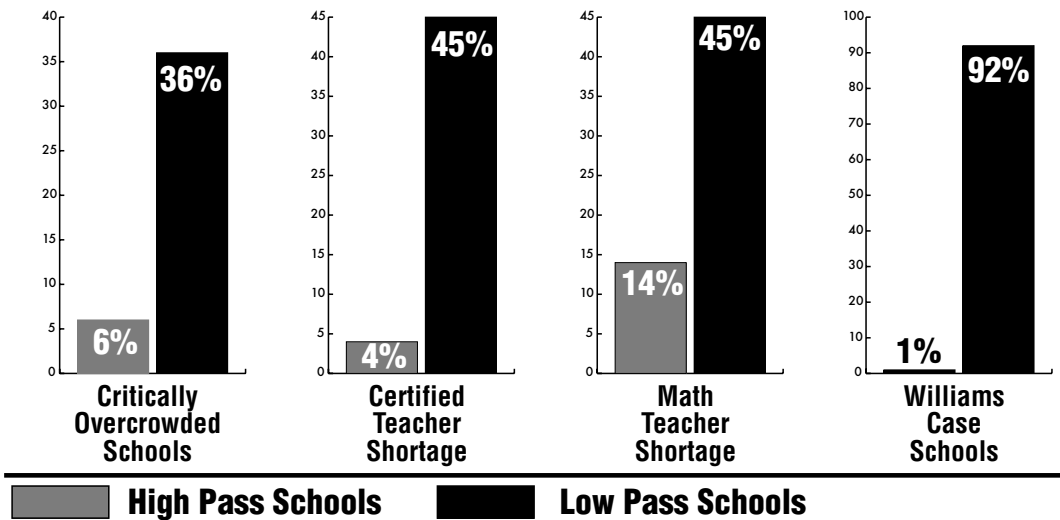


A more accurate, and even more disturbing, picture of the learning conditions experienced by the average student in **LPR** and **HPR** schools is revealed when we account for differences in school size. Because the most troubling conditions are found in the largest **LPR** schools, the proportion (and actual number) of students facing these conditions is far greater than the proportion of schools implies. Specifically, the 100,013 students in the LPR schools were:

- 6 times more likely to be in a critically overcrowded school than students in **HPR** schools. They are also more likely to be in a year round school. (1 in 6 students in **LPR** schools are also in a year-round school, but *no* student in a **HPR** school is also in a year-round school.)
- 11 times more likely to be in a school with critical shortages of fully credentialed teachers.
- 3 times more likely to be in a school where at least 50% of math classes are taught by teachers who are not certified to teach mathematics.
- Far more likely to be enrolled in schools designated as *Williams* schools. While 92% of all students in **LPR** schools were in *Williams* schools, just 1% of students in **HPR** schools were in *Williams* schools.

Figure 2

Percentage of STUDENTS with the following Opportunity Problems:

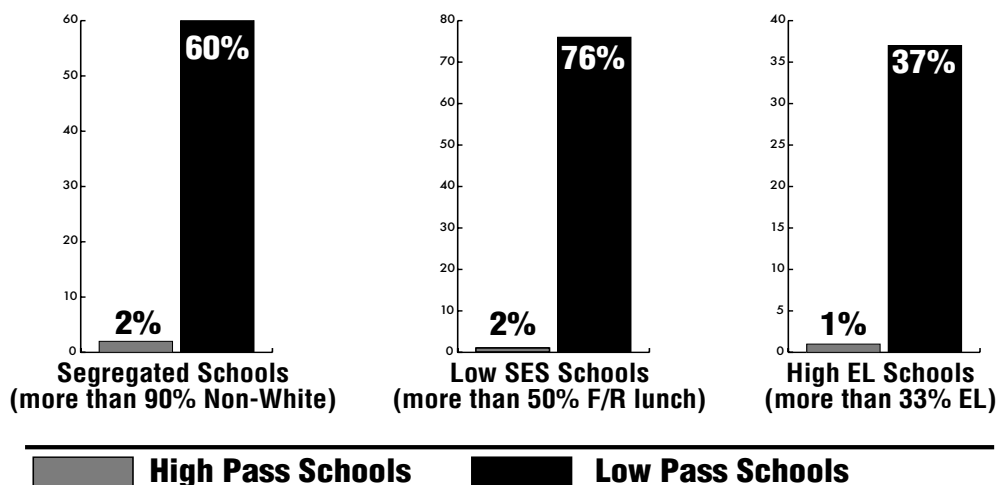


Students in **LPR** schools are also far more likely than students in **HPR** schools to be enrolled in racially segregated schools with high concentrations of poverty. Specifically, students in **LPR** schools are

- 30 times more likely to be in hyper-segregated schools (90% or more non-white) than students in **HPR** schools.
- 38 times more likely to be in schools with high concentrations of poverty (greater than 50% of students receiving free/reduced lunch) than students in **HPR** schools.
- 37 times more likely to be in schools with high concentrations of English Language Learners (greater than 33% of students classified EL).

Figure 3

Percentage of Students in Racially, Economically, and Linguistically Segregated Schools





II. CDE's Calculations: How Many Students in the Class of 2006 Have Not Passed the CAHSEE?

In the August data release, the CDE did not provide the number or percentage of students who have satisfied the CAHSEE requirement for graduation. We know how many students have passed the ELA test, and we know how many passed the mathematics test. But, we have no idea how many have passed *both* the ELA and mathematics section of the CAHSEE. Therefore, we do not know how many students in the Class of 2006 are on track for graduation or are currently at risk of being denied a diploma. While the state's independent evaluator, HumRRO, is slated to release their estimate of this number next month, it will only provide these numbers for the state as a whole. We will have no way of knowing how many students are at risk in any particular region, county, district, or school.

The report that the CDE released contains other serious problems. The most serious of these is CDE's calculations of passing rates on the individual sections of the exam both at the state level and for different sub-groups of students. These calculations *over-estimate the percentage of students who have passed either the ELA or mathematics portion of the exam, because they exclude students who are likely to fail the exam.*

In the 2004-05 academic year, Eleventh graders in the Class of 2006 who failed one or both portions of the CAHSEE in the 10th grade had two opportunities in 2005 to re-take the sections they had failed (one opportunity in the fall, one in the spring). However, because the state lacks a way to match tests of individual students on multiple administrations of the CAHSEE, the CDE had no way of knowing whether the students who failed the test in the fall were the same ones re-taking the test in the spring. Thus, while the CDE could determine the number of students passing either exam, they had no way of knowing exactly how many failed, and thus what the true failure rate is on either portion of the exam.

In their August 15th report, then, the CDE approximated the passing (and failing) rates using the following formula: the total number of students in the Class of 2006 who passed the exam during 10th or 11th grade, divided by number of students who passed plus the number of students who failed the exam in the spring administration, as shown below in Figure 4. In other words, they used the number of students in the original pool of 10th-graders, *minus* dropouts, *minus* students who didn't take the test this spring for any other reason.

This calculation is misleading and inaccurate because it excludes more than 40,000 students in the Class of 2006, including two groups of students that are the least likely to pass. The first of these groups consists of the 11th grade students in the Class of 2006 who failed the exam, but did not re-take it in the spring of 2005. The law only requires that students be given an *opportunity* to take the exam again in the spring of their junior



year; it does not require them to take it. Many students who failed as 10th graders and then again as 11th graders in the fall of 2004 may choose to wait until 12th grade to take the test again. The second group excluded from the CDE calculations is the group of students who failed the exam and then dropped out of school, either between 10th and 11th grade or during the 11th grade. These students are important to include when calculating the overall pass rates because Californians do not want the fact that students have dropped out of school to enhance the appearance of the testing program’s success.

We re-calculated the pass rates for each portion of the exam based on a more realistic count of the students who are required to take the exam—all of those enrolled as 10th graders in 2003-2004. This number is reported in CBEDS, based on data the schools provide in October. Our UCLA/IDEA pass rate, then, is *the percentage of students from the original number of 10th graders that has passed the test by the spring of 2005*. Our calculation provides a more accurate picture of overall pass rates, because it includes all 10th grade students who were officially enrolled in the fall of 2003, and who were subject to the CAHSEE graduation requirement.⁵

Figure 4

The CDE pass rate calculation is as follows:

- **The total number of students who have passed**
Divided by
- **The total number of students in the original pool of 10th graders**
Minus
- **Dropouts**
Minus
- **Students who didn't take the test this past spring for any other reason**

The UCLA/IDEA calculation is:

- **The total number of students who have passed**
Divided by
- **The total number of students in the original pool of 10th graders**

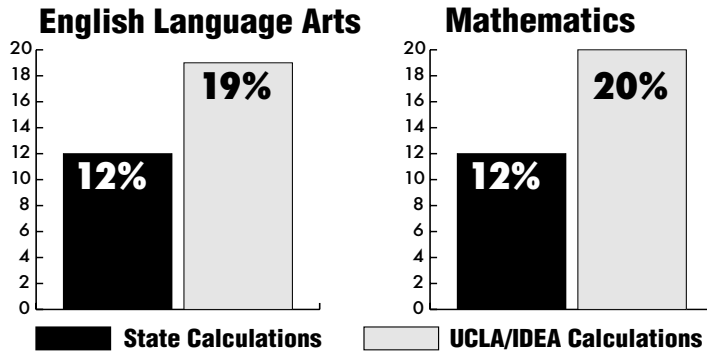
Whereas the state’s data show that 88% of students have passed the ELA section of the exam, we find that 81% of students have passed. For mathematics, the state claims that 88% of students have passed, but our numbers show that 80% of passed.

Using our calculations, the number of students who must pass the exam in 12th grade is far higher than state figures, assuming that these students continue to enroll in school. A significant and as yet unanswered question is whether failure on the exam caused some students to become discouraged and drop out when they otherwise would not have. However, this important question cannot be answered without additional data.



Figure 5

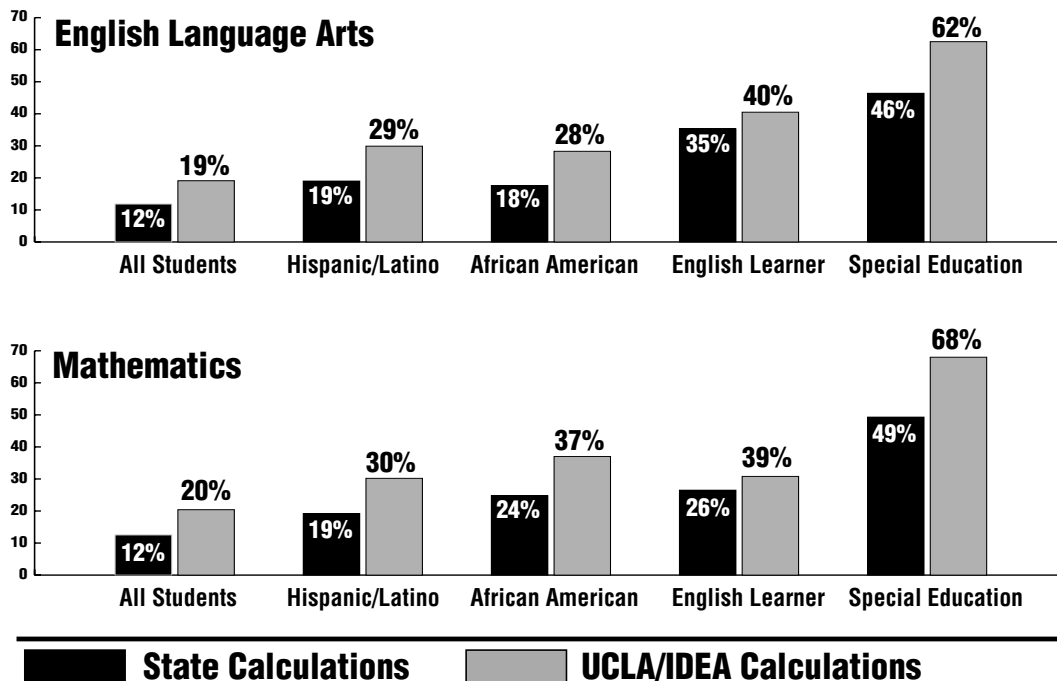
Re-Calculated Percentage of Students who have Not Passed in the Class of 2006 is Higher than State Reported Numbers



These more accurate percentages of students who have not passed either the ELA or mathematics section are even higher for some sub-groups of students.⁶ It is worth repeating that we do not have access to data regarding the total number of students who have not passed both exams. Since many students have passed just one of the two tests, the percentage of students who have not passed *both* tests is likely much higher, and could be as high as 40%.

Figure 6a and 6b

Calculated Percentage of Students who have Not Passed in the Class of 2006





MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS:

Given that each 1 percent of the cohort equals nearly 5,000 students, these differences of 7 to 19 percent between the CDE and UCLA calculations translate into very large numbers of students.

Calculations of the pass rates and “not passed” rates that begin with the Class of 2006’s enrollment as 9th graders yield even smaller success rates. Neither the CDE’s nor our UCLA analyses include the more than 30,000 students who were classified as 9th graders in 2002-2003 (therefore, members of the Class of 2006), but who did not enroll as 10th graders the following year. If we include these students in the calculation, we find that, over all groups, only 76% of the class has passed the ELA test and only 75% has passed the mathematics section. The pass rates in ELA for subgroups fall to 63% for Latinos, 65% for African Americans, 48% for English Learners, and 35% for Special Education students. The pass rates in math for these groups are even lower, at 63%, 57%, 56%, and 30% respectively, for these sub-groups.



III. More Answers Needed: What Does the Public Need to Know to Understand the Full Impact of the CAHSEE?

The state must address several important questions about the number of diplomas denied to students because of the CAHSEE requirement, the impact of the CAHSEE on dropout rates, and the relationship between passing rates on the CAHSEE and the learning opportunities that schools provide. Some questions can be answered now, some only at the end of the 2005/06 academic year, and some questions may be unanswerable until the state implements its plan for a comprehensive longitudinal data system with unique student identifiers. Answers are needed to understand the full impact of the exit exam on California's students and schools:

1. How many students who have met all graduation requirements except CAHSEE will be denied a diploma? How does this break down by student sub-group?
2. What is the impact of the exit exam on dropout rates in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades? How do enrollment declines for each of these grades differ between the Class of 2006 and previous graduating classes? How many of the students who have *not* passed one or both of the exams have dropped out of school? How many students who have passed one or both exams have also dropped out of school? How do these numbers break down by student sub-group?
3. How do pass rates vary by school learning conditions? How do learning conditions vary between schools with high and low failure rates on the exam, particularly with respect to the extent to which English-language arts and mathematics courses are taught by credentialed teachers with subject matter authorization; the extent to which standards-based textbooks and instructional materials have been made available to teachers and students; the extent to which standards-based instruction has been implemented across different types of schools; and the extent to which struggling students have been provided with additional resources and support, particularly in LPR schools?

This year is a crucial one for educators, students, and state leaders in California. Policy makers and education officials are asking students to *prove* that they deserve a diploma, and to do so under circumstances that appear highly unequal. As the state with the largest number of high school seniors, the stakes could not be higher. Without answers to the questions above, Californians cannot not feel at ease with *any* number of students being denied diplomas.

It may take years for the state to solve problems that currently prevent all students from having a reasonable and fair opportunity to learn what they are being held accountable for on the CAHSEE. However, the state can and should act immediately to develop its long-stalled data system that will allow us to assess students' performance accurately and to understand better how the conditions and opportunities in their schools relate to that performance.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS:

Endnotes

- ¹ For more information about UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, visit www.ucla-idea.org.
- ² Darling-Hammond, L., Rustique-Forrester, E., & Pecheone, R. (2005). *Multiple measures approaches to high school graduation*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford School Redesign Network.
- ³ Orfield, G., Losen, D., Wald, J., & Swanson, C., (2004). *Losing our future: How minority youth are being left behind by the graduation rate crisis*, Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Contributors: Advocates for Children of New York, The Civil Society Institute.
- ⁴ The August 2004 settlement of *Williams v. California* identifies a set of schools, which we term "Williams schools," that lack basic learning conditions and that require additional resources and oversight.
- ⁵ According to the state, however, approximately 40,000 10th graders did not take the CAHSEE originally in the Spring of their 10th grade year when required to do so. Because the state does not use a unique student identifier system, it is impossible to tell why this drop-off occurred. Further, we cannot tell from the most recently reported state denominator: 1) how many students took the test in 11th grade and did not originally take it in 10th; 2) how many who originally took the test in 10th grade did not take it in 11th grade; and 3) how many students in the 10th grade enrollment count dropped out entirely (some who were likely retained probably did drop out.)
- ⁶ Students who have "not passed" include both those students who have taken the test and failed and those students who have not taken the test, but who are subject to the exam requirement.



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