



CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

1430 N STREET  
SACRAMENTO, CA  
95814-5901

**JACK O'CONNELL**

State Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

PHONE: (916) 319-0800

November 30, 2005

Dear Interested Person:

### **CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMINATION ALTERNATIVES PUBLIC MEETING**

The California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) has proven to be a major reform effort in making sure that California high school students are provided a rigorous curriculum to be successful in the post-secondary environment and compete in today's information-driven global economy. The CAHSEE was first administered to the Class of 2004 in the spring of 2001. Since then, the CAHSEE has been revised and the consequence delayed to 2006. The graduating Class of 2006 will be the first class required to pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a high school diploma. These students took the CAHSEE initially as sophomores in the spring of 2004 and the test has been administered several times each subsequent year.

Recently the independent evaluator of the CAHSEE, the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), released an independent evaluation report, as required by law. One of the primary goals of the CAHSEE was to bring increased meaning to earning a California high school diploma and to ensure that all students that graduate from a California public high school have met at least minimum academic standards. The HumRRO found that the CAHSEE has indeed led to increased alignment of instruction to California Content Standards, and that this alignment has increased steadily over the past several years at both the high school and middle school levels. I strongly believe the report's main recommendation—to keep the CAHSEE requirement in place for the Class of 2006 and beyond—is an appropriate and important recommendation.

The HumRRO also recommends the consideration of options for those students who may be unable to satisfy the CAHSEE requirement by June 2006. In addition, California *Education Code* Section 60856, a part of the CAHSEE law, directs the study of “. . . the appropriateness of other criteria by which high school pupils who are regarded as highly proficient but unable to pass the high school exit examination may demonstrate their competency and receive a high school diploma.” Thus, I have directed my staff to study options for these students.

As one step in this process, I would like to invite you to meet with my staff to provide information on options for these students to satisfy the CAHSEE requirement. This public meeting will be held on December 15, 2005, in the State Board Room at 1430 N Street in Sacramento. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. The information provided should focus on alternatives you believe would constitute a method by which students may demonstrate their competency on the standards covered on the CAHSEE at the same level of rigor as the CAHSEE. In addition to your appearance at this meeting, I invite you to provide a written

November 30, 2005  
Page 2

summary describing the alternatives you will present, including support for your belief that these alternatives are of equal rigor to the CAHSEE and are an appropriate means of assessing these students.

Please provide these written comments by December 7, 2005, to:

Amy Cameron, Consultant  
Executive Office  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street, Suite 5602  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

If you are interested in presenting at the meeting, please contact Amy Cameron, at (916) 322-4917 by December 9, 2005, to confirm your attendance. If you are unable to attend the public meeting, but would like to submit written comments, please send them to Ms. Cameron at the above address by December 15, 2005.

As I have stated previously, if at the end of this process I am convinced that an alternative would ensure students are able to demonstrate their competency on the standards assessed by the CAHSEE at the same level of rigor and that such alternatives would be in the best interest of all California's students, I will work with the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature to implement such options by June 2006. Additionally, I will provide a report to the State Board of Education at its January 2006 meeting in furtherance of the Board's study pursuant to *Education Code* Section 60856.

While it is appropriate to consider these options, it is critical that in doing so we keep one core principle front and center: awarding a student a diploma without the knowledge and skills to back it up does a great disservice to that student. I want every student in California to get a diploma, but more importantly, I want every student in California to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to truly compete.

Thank you again for your support of public education in California and your willingness to provide recommendations to further strengthen California's education system. I look forward to reviewing any information you will be providing.

If you have any additional questions about the public meeting, please contact Amy Cameron, Consultant, Executive Office, at (916) 322-4917.

Sincerely,



JACK O'CONNELL

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