California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-002 (REV. 11/2017)

memo-imab-adad-oct22item02

# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 13, 2022

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Changes to the California High School Proficiency Program.

## Summary of Key Issues

California *Education Code* (*EC*) sections 48410–16 establish the high school proficiency program. Beginning July 1, 2023, the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) will transition to a program that affords students an opportunity to take a high school equivalency (HSE) test that is approved by the California State Board of Education (SBE) to demonstrate their basic proficiency in language arts and mathematics. The Assessment Development and Administration Division of the California Department of Education (CDE) will facilitate the transition.

Effective July 1, 2023, students eligible for and interested in taking a high school proficiency test will be assessed by means of either the GED® or the HiSET® instead of the existing CHSPE. Scores students receive will use vendor-established performance metrics that are aligned with the college and career readiness standards. The CDE provides the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/elaanchorstandards.asp>. The standards on that web page define general, cross‑disciplinary literacy expectations that students must meet to enter college and be prepared to succeed in workforce training programs. Students who pass both the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics subtests (passers) shall receive a certificate of proficiency and, with the approval of their parent or guardian, may leave high school.

A benefit of using the HSE tests is that passers may choose not to leave high school after receiving their certificate of proficiency and may continue taking the remaining two HSE subtests: history/social science (HSS) and science. These proficiency passers are eligible, regardless of age, to take the HSS and science subtests—with the same HSE vendor they used previously for the ELA and mathematics subtests—to obtain a certificate of equivalency.

### Overview

The CHSPE was established by *EC* Section 48412. Students who are sixteen years of age or older, or who have been enrolled in grade ten for one academic year, are eligible to take the CHSPE. In the past six academic years, California students have taken the CHSPE at the rate of approximately 5,000 students annually. It is administered throughout the state on designated dates in the fall and spring of each year with an optional test administration in the summer.

The CHSPE provides an opportunity for eligible students to demonstrate their basic proficiency in ELA and mathematics. Upon passing the CHSPE, students earn a certificate of proficiency, which in California is the legal equivalent of a high school diploma. Once a student has passed the CHSPE, the student may seek parent or guardian approval to exit high school in order to begin a career or seek higher education. The CHSPE is recognized by all California State Universities, the University of California, California community colleges, and most California trade schools as a legal equivalent to a high school diploma. Outside of California, the CHSPE may not be recognized as the equivalent of a high school diploma.

While the CHSPE is a test for currently enrolled students to leave high school early, the HSE tests offer test takers who previously left high school an opportunity to test their knowledge of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and receive a certificate of proficiency. A certificate of proficiency is recognized nationally and internationally by nearly all universities and trade schools.

### History

The CHSPE emerged from a number of legislative provisions, starting in the 1970s, that debated aspects of compulsory education laws, the costs of continuation education, a number of means to determine high school proficiency, and safeguards for students wishing to exit high school at age sixteen or after grade ten.

In 1972, compulsory education law required students to attend school from ages six to sixteen. Students sixteen and seventeen years of age who had not graduated from high school were required to attend continuation education classes until they either graduated or turned eighteen. Although most sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students continued with their education through graduation, an increasing number of students left school or entered continuation classes. The low number of weekly class hours required by the continuation classes allowed those students the opportunity to gain employment.

The growing enrollment in continuation education was expensive to maintain and had a lack of appeal for a population of students with poor attendance. To address those concerns, legislation was proposed to eliminate the law that requires continuation education, but the bill failed under opposition from many statewide education organizations and several of the state’s largest school districts.

A subsequent bill contained provisions that directed the CDE to devise “a means to determine proficiency” in high school-level skills and a way for students to request to have their proficiency affirmed. While the certificate of proficiency would not be equivalent to a high school diploma, this bill would add alternatives to compulsory continuation attendance with parental permission. Opposition to the bill led to follow-up legislation converting the status of the certificate of proficiency to that of a high school diploma. Concern that some school administrators would take advantage of the proficiency exemption from compulsory attendance as a means to remove unwanted, disruptive, or minority students, a provision was added that gave students the right to re-enroll in the same school at any time before turning eighteen.

In 1973, Senate Bill (SB) 52 altered the statutory status of the certificate of proficiency, requiring that the certificate become equivalent to a diploma when its holder turns eighteen in recognition of California law for the General Educational Development (GED) exam. At that time, the GED (an acronym and not a registered trademark) was owned and operated by the American Council on Education. SB 52 ultimately provided that those who earned a certain minimum passing score on the GED would, if they submitted evidence of the passing score along with a small fee to the CDE, be awarded a Certificate of High School Proficiency, legally equivalent to a high school diploma for the purpose of public employment. The bill was amended to give the certificate of proficiency an immediate and unqualified parity with a high school diploma (*EC* Section 48414).

In the 1975 legislative session, a loan was authorized (SB 1243) to the CDE in an amount estimated to be adequate for one year of operation of the CHSPE. This loan was to be repaid over two years with the proceeds from CHSPE application fees. The loan continues to be a part of the annual budget process; however, the program is operating on a reimbursement contract up to the annual budgeted amount of $1,274,000.

In December 2002, the CDE entered into a contract with Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) to administer the CHSPE. No bid was required as this was an interagency agreement and was strictly a cost reimbursement contract from the collection of test taker fees. Educational Testing Service was the subcontractor for the scoring of the tests.

In May 2003, the CDE released a Request for Applications (RFA) for the CHSPE for 2004–06. The RFA required bidders to propose the use of a commercially available, nationally normed test for the CHSPE, replacing the then-current version of the test. SCOE proposed using the *Stanford Achievement Test Series*, Tenth Edition (SAT10) and Stanford Writing Assessment Program, Third Edition. SCOE was awarded the contract, and then worked with the CDE and Harcourt to implement the CHSPE using the SAT10.

In August 2006, the CDE released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the CHSPE for 2007–09. As with the 2003 RFA, the 2006 RFP required bidders to propose the use of a commercially available, nationally normed test. SCOE again proposed the use of the SAT10 and Stanford Writing Assessment Program, with a different structure for one of the CHSPE sections as explained below. The SAT10 and the Stanford Writing Assessment Program were developed and owned by Harcourt Assessment, Inc., which was acquired by Pearson Educational Assessment (Pearson) in January 2008. SCOE was awarded the contract.

In December 2010, the CDE awarded SCOE a new interagency agreement contract to administer the CHSPE from October 2010 through September 2014, using the same tests and test structure. That same contract and test structure were renewed in July 2014 for administration from July 2014 through June 2020.

During discussions about the extension of the contract in 2016, SCOE indicated that Pearson was planning to retire the SAT10 by the end of the year. SCOE stated that they had negotiated an agreement with Pearson to continue using the SAT10 through 2017, but would have only limited use of all assessment services by 2018.

The SAT10 is not aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and efforts to identify a suitable off-the-shelf replacement for the SAT10 that is aligned with the CCSS have been unsuccessful. In 2019, the CDE issued a Request for Application (RFA), to find a qualified assessment from a commercial vendor that might be willing to provide the CDE with the ability to use the respondent’s test for the CHSPE. The CDE did not receive any qualified applications.

In January 2020, the CDE conducted a market survey to gather information to determine whether there are any commercially available, nationally-normed tests that measure achievement of the CCSS in ELA and mathematics taught in California public high schools. The survey found no qualified tests available for the intended use.

Having found no CCSS-aligned tests, the CDE began discussions, in early 2020, with the vendors of the SBE-approved HSE tests to consider allowing students enrolled in the second semester of grade ten to take an HSE test of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for the CHSPE.

### Why Transition

The SAT10, currently used for the CHSPE, is an outdated examination that is no longer supported by Pearson. Students are able to take the exam only on select dates, in proctored testing centers, via a paper-based test. Every year, the cost of the test increases on the basis of the expected number of test takers and SCOE’s fixed and variable costs. The 2021–23 registration cost for the examination is $230. Students needing to retake the examination are expected to pay the full fee. Some students take the examination up to three times, at a cost of nearly $700.

The CDE has determined that transitioning to another test is necessary given how antiquated the SAT10 is, the limitations of paper-based administration of the SAT10, the SAT10 being offered only in English, the SAT10 being offered only at locally proctored testing centers (when space is available), and the increasingly prohibitive cost of the SAT10 for the average student.

### California High School Proficiency Program—July 1, 2023

Beginning July 1, 2023, an eligible student (a student enrolled in their second semester of grade ten (regardless of age) may register for and take either the GED® or HiSET® language arts and mathematics subtests. Eligible students who receive scores that meet or exceed the vendor’s College and Career Readiness performance standards shall receive their Certificate of Proficiency and, with parent/guardian approval, may exit high school. An eligible student (regardless of age) who has received their Certificate of Proficiency may, with the approval of their parent or guardian, leave high school or if they choose, register to take the remaining HSE subtests (history/social science and science) to obtain a certificate of equivalency.

#### Benefits

The shift from the CHSPE to the options of the GED® and HiSET® shall have the following benefits for students or parents and guardians:

* GED® and HiSET® offer paper-based testing as well as an online computer-based testing.
* GED® and HiSET® paper-based tests may only be taken in-person at an approved HSE testing center.
* GED® and HiSET® online computer-based tests may be taken in-person at an approved HSE testing center (with “live” proctors) or remotely (with live “virtual” proctoring).
* GED® and HiSET® remotely administered tests may be taken 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
* GED® and HiSET® tests are less expensive than the current CHSPE registration of $230 per test administration (regardless of whether the student sits for the entire test or a single subtest).
  + 2022–23 GED® fees: $35 per subtest (may not include testing center fee) and $41 per online proctored subtest
  + 2022–23 HiSET® fees: $12.75 per computer-based subtest (for “at-home” testing, there is an additional $17.50 proctoring fee per subtest) and $17 per paper-based subtest (may not include testing center fee)
* GED® and HiSET® tests are offered in English and Spanish for both the paper-based and computer-based tests.
* GED® and HiSET® offer free or reduced pricing to retake a subtest.
* GED® and HiSET® tests are recognized globally by institutions of higher learning and trade schools.
* Test takers may stop after receiving their certificate of proficiency or continue taking the additional subtests to receive their certificate of equivalency.
* Passing the language arts and mathematics subtests of either GED® or HiSET® will afford the test taker entry into the remaining HSE tests, regardless of age.
* GED® and HiSET® tests offer practice tests and test preparation programs.
* GED® and HiSET® refresh their tests annually.
* California has more than 600 approved HSE testing centers, and more are added each month.
* Test takers will create either GED® or HiSET® accounts and will have 24-hour access to their scores and student resources.
* Test takers who take a computer-based test will receive their results immediately upon completion.
* Test takers will receive electronic transcripts and electronic certificates that can be securely e-mailed to schools and employers.

The shift from the CHSPE to a certificate of proficiency program that uses the GED® or HiSET® may help LEAs to redirect students at risk of dropping out into the certificate of proficiency program. If such students were to receive either the certificate of proficiency or certificate of equivalency, they would be counted as high school completers, not dropouts, for state accountability purposes.

By partnering with the HSE vendors, the CDE increases students’ accessibility to a certificate of proficiency at a time, place, and with a mode (either paper-based testing or computer-based testing) that best meets their needs. This partnership will also allow students to build on their accomplishment of having received a certificate of proficiency by giving them the option of continuing their journey and earning a certificate of equivalency. The proficiency exam will be offered in English and Spanish, broadening the population of test takers and further increasing accessibility. Finally, this partnership will allow the CDE to offer a proficiency program that meets higher expectations, aligning with College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and preparing students to be successful in their pursuit of a career or higher education.

## Attachment(s)

None.