CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The California High School Exit Examination

California has just concluded the second year spring administration of its High School Exit Examination, which is part of the state's requirement of students to pass a graduation exam in mathematics and English-language arts (ELA) beginning with the Class of 2004. California began this initiative in response to widespread support for high standards and the corresponding need for some mechanism that holds students to those standards. As a component of California's testing program, the exit examination is intended to ensure that all students graduating from high school demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The California Education Code, Chapter 8, Section 60850, specifies requirements for the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)[2]. In the fall of 2001, Educational Testing Service (ETS), which became the development contractor with the California Department of Education (CDE), assumed control of the existing item (test question) database from the prior contractor, American Institutes of Research (AIR) and started development and field-testing of additional questions used in the CAHSEE and the operational tests administered to 10th graders in March and May of 2002.

The legislation that mandates the requirements for the graduation exam also specifies an independent evaluation of the CAHSEE. CDE awarded a contract for this evaluation to the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO). HumRRO's efforts focus on analyses of data from the field test of items, the field-test administration of the examination, and the annual administrations of the CAHSEE, and report on trends in pupil performance and retention, graduation, dropout, and college attendance rates. The legislation also specifies that evaluation reporting will include recommendations for improving the quality, fairness, validity, and reliability of the examination. The present report meets the contract requirement for a report of activities and findings during the third year of the evaluation. This report extends results beyond those reported in the legislatively mandated January 2002 report covering the 2001 CAHSEE administration (Wise, Sipes, Harris, George, Ford, & Sun, 2002).

Plans for conducting the evaluation have been updated each year in response to new and evolving information about the development and implementation of the CAHSEE (Wise, Hoffman, & Harris, 2000; Wise, Hoffman, Harris, Sipes, & Ford, 2000; Wise, Sipes, George, Ford, & Harris, 2001; Wise et al. 2002). These processes are summarized briefly in the next two sections to provide a context for the continuing evaluation activities.

Summary of Year 1 Activities

The Year 1 evaluation activities involved reviewing and analyzing three types of information:

Review of Test Developer Plans and Reports. No formal reports were available during the first year; thus, we attended meetings and listened to presentations by the development

[2] As specified in the Education Code, the CAHSEE consists of two separately timed and scored sections, referred to in this report as the ELA test and the mathematics test.

contractor AIR and by the CDE. We also monitored various presentations to the HSEE Panel and to the State Board of Education (SBE) and had direct conversations with members of each of these groups.

Statewide Data Sources. An initial source of information for our evaluation was data from the CAHSEE pilot administration. We also examined 1999 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR; for details see http://star.cde.ca.gov/) results with plans to monitor trends in STAR results over the course of the evaluation.

District and School Sample. We selected a representative sample of 24 districts and approximately 90 of their high schools to establish a longitudinal group for study. The baseline surveys, which were administered to principals and English-language arts and mathematics teachers, provided an initial look at schools' perspectives of the impact of CAHSEE on their programs. We also recruited teachers and curriculum experts from these schools and their districts to review test items and tell us if they covered knowledge and skills not covered for all students in their current curriculum.

The following summarizes the specific recommendations made at the end of the Year 1 evaluation activities.

Recommendation 1. The Legislature and Governor should give serious consideration to postponing full implementation of the CAHSEE requirement by 1 or 2 years.

Recommendation 2. The CDE should develop and seek comment on a more detailed timeline for CAHSEE implementation activities. This timeline should show responsibility for each required task and responsibility for oversight of the performance of each task. The plan should show key points at which decisions by the Board or others are required along with separate paths for alternative decisions that may be made at each of these points.

Recommendation 3. The CDE and the Board should work with districts to identify resource requirements associated with CAHSEE implementation. The Legislature must be ready to continue to fund activities to support the preparation of students to meet the ambitious challenges embodied in the CAHSEE.

Recommendation 4. The Board should adopt a clear statement of its intentions in setting CAHSEE content and performance standards. This statement should describe the extent to which these standards are targeted to ensure minimum achievement relative to current levels or to significantly advance overall expectations for student achievement.

Recommendation 5. The Board should exhibit moderation in selecting content standards and setting performance standards for the initial implementation of CAHSEE. Subsequently, standards should be expanded or increased based on evidence of improved instruction.

Recommendation 6. Members of the HSEE Panel and its Technical Advisory Committee should participate in developing recommendations for minimum performance standards.

Recommendation 7. The CDE should move swiftly to establish an independent Technical Issues Committee (TIC) to recommend approval or changes to the CAHSEE

development contractor's plans for item screening, form assembly, form equating, scoring, and reporting.

Complete details of the Year 1 effort, including selection procedures for the longitudinal sample, are presented in a primary and a supplemental report describing evaluation activities, findings, and recommendations (Wise et al., 2000a; Wise et al., 2000b). Those two evaluation reports emphasize both the positive aspects of the results, as indicated by several measures of the quality of the test questions, and the amount of work remaining to be done before operational administration of the CAHSEE. The primary apprehension noted in these reports was educators' concern that students are currently not well prepared to pass the exam.

District Baseline Survey Resulting from Year 1 Activities

The results of the baseline survey of teachers and principals in the longitudinal sample of high schools indicated concern with the degree to which students were being provided sufficient opportunities to learn the material covered by the CAHSEE. After reviewing these concerns, the SBE and the CDE requested an additional survey of all public high school and unified districts in California. HumRRO developed and sent out the CAHSEE District Baseline Survey shortly after the SBE adopted the CAHSEE and its content, which was required prior to October 1, 2000. The survey covered plans for changes in curriculum and other programs to help students pass the examination. We asked that each district have the survey completed by an Assistant Superintendent or Director of Curriculum and Instruction, or the individual at the district level who was most knowledgeable about CAHSEE.

The survey, which built on and benefited from the results of the longitudinal sample survey, addressed five critical topics:

1. *Awareness* of the CAHSEE, its content, administration plans, and requirements for student participation.
2. *Alignment* of the district's curriculum to statewide content standards, particularly those to be covered by the CAHSEE.
3. *Plans and Preparation* for increasing opportunities for all students to learn the material covered by the CAHSEE and to help students who do not initially pass the examination.
4. *Expectations* for passing rates and for the effect of the CAHSEE on instruction and the status of specific programs offered in the district.
5. *Outcome baselines,* including retention and graduation rates and students' postgraduation plans.

The following general conclusions were drawn from results of the district survey:

1. *General awareness* of the CAHSEE is high, but more information is needed, particularly for students and parents, about (a) the knowledge and skills covered by the CAHSEE and (b) plans for administration and reporting.
2. *Districts report high degrees of alignment* of their own content standards to the state content standards. The survey addressed this question at a general level; more work is needed to assess and document the degree to which each district's curriculum covers the content standards tested by the CAHSEE and the degree of student access to courses that offer such coverage.
3. *Districts have implemented or are planning a number of programs* to prepare students and teachers for the CAHSEE and to assist students who do not initially pass. The most frequently planned activities include more summer school, tutoring, and matching student needs to specific courses.
4. *Districts believe the CAHSEE will have a positive impact* on curriculum and instruction. Most expect at least half of their students to pass the CAHSEE on their first attempt.

[5. *Outcome baselines* will be used in future years.]

Complete details of the district-wide survey effort are presented in a final technical report describing evaluation activities, findings, and recommendations (Sipes, Harris, Wise, & Gribben, 2001).

Summary of Year 2 Activities

The Year 2 evaluation activities involved reviewing and analyzing three types of information:

Review of Test Developer Plans and Reports. We continued to monitor test development activities, ranging from observation of and presentations to the HSEE Panel to observation of the standard-setting workshops to develop recommendations for minimum passing scores for each of the two portions of the CAHSEE test: mathematics and ELA. We reviewed and participated in numerous discussions concerning the equating of alternate forms, the score scale used, and the minimum passing levels.

Analysis of Field-Test and Operational CAHSEE Data. We analyzed results from a second field test of new CAHSEE questions, conducted in fall 2000, and began analyses from the operational administrations of CAHSEE in March and May of 2001. Initial analyses of technical characteristics of the test form used in the March administration and the resulting passing rates were described in our Year 2 Evaluation Report (Wise et al., June 2001).

Surveys of District and School Sample Personnel. The representative sample of 24 districts and approximately 90 of their high schools required replacement of one district with three schools. The surveys, which were administered to principals and English-language arts and mathematics teachers, provided a continuing look at schools'

perspectives of the impact of the CAHSEE on their programs. In addition, testing coordinators were surveyed to identify issues with the administration of the CAHSEE.

The following summarizes the two general and six specific recommendations made in our report of the Year 2 evaluation activities.

Recommendation 1. Stay the course. The legislature and Board should continue to require students in the Class of 2004 to pass the exam, but monitor schools' progress in helping most or all of their students to master the required standards.

Recommendation 2. The legislature and Board should continue to consider options for students with disabilities and English learners.

Recommendation 3. The CAHSEE needs more technical oversight as its development and administration continues.

Recommendation 4. For future classes, delay testing until the 10th grade.

Recommendation 5. Construct a practice test of released CAHSEE items and give it to districts and schools to use with 9th graders to identify students at risk of failing the CAHSEE.

Recommendation 6. Monitor test administration more extensively and develop a system for identifying and resolving issues.

Recommendation 7. Develop and implement a more comprehensive statewide information system that will allow the CDE to monitor individual student progress.

Recommendation 8. The Superintendent, SBE, and legislature should specify in more detail how students in special circumstances will be treated by the CAHSEE requirements.

Complete details of the Year 2 effort are presented in a primary and a supplemental report describing evaluation activities, findings, and recommendations (Wise et al., 2001; Wise et al., 2002). Those two evaluation reports emphasize both the positive aspects of the results, as indicated by several measures of the quality of the test questions, and the amount of work remaining to be done before operational administration of the CAHSEE. The primary apprehension noted in these reports was educators' concern that students are currently not well prepared to pass the exam.

Organization and Contents of Year 3 Evaluation Report

The Year 3 Evaluation Report covers activities performed in the independent evaluation through June 29, 2002. One major activity during Year 3 was development of the legislatively required first biennial report to the legislature, governor, State Board of Education, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Wise et al., 2002). This report, which was submitted in January 2002, described results and implications from the March and May 2001 administrations. It included updates of the recommendations from our Year 2 Evaluation Report.

Chapters 2–5 of the current report describe other activities conducted during Year 3 and present the results of these activities. The final chapter describes the main findings from

these results and our recommendations based on them. The Year 3 Report satisfies a contractual requirement to report on evaluation activities each year. Results from our activities have led to several recommendations that respond to the evaluation requirement for suggestions to improve the quality and effectiveness of the exam and its use.

Chapter 2 presents HumRRO's observations on the contractor's efforts to develop and review test questions and describes results from our new, independent review of test questions conducted in May of this year. Observations on the administration and scoring processes are included along with an evaluation of scoring consistency based on a comparison of the March 2002 administration with the 2001 administrations.

Chapter 3 presents analyses of preliminary results from the March 2002 CAHSEE administration. The analyses show passing rates for different demographic groups and an analysis of gains for students who tested in 2001. Scoring and equating have not yet been completed for the May 2002 administration so analyses of the May results are not included here. Chapter 4 presents responses to the student questionnaire administered at the end of each testing session. The questions focus on student preparation, their reactions to the test, and their plans. The analysis includes changes in expectations for graduation and post-high-school plans for students who completed questionnaires in both 2001 and 2002.

Chapter 5 describes results from the second spring survey of teachers and principals participating in the longitudinal study sample. HumRRO continued to organize the evaluation information into five critical areas:

- Awareness of and familiarity with the CAHSEE
- Alignment of the districts' curricula to state/CAHSEE content standards
- Planning and preparation for the CAHSEE
- Expectations of impact on instruction, passing rates, and consequences of the CAHSEE
- Potential effect on dropout and graduation rates and college attendance

Chapter 6 presents our Findings and Recommendations based on the existing state of data analyses and results.