

CLIENT NEWS BRIEF

New Laws Suspend High School Exit Exam Requirements

On October 7, 2015, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill (SB) 172 into law, suspending the administration of the California High School Exit Examination through the 2017-2018 school year. Under SB 172 students will no longer be required to pass the exit exam as a condition of graduating high school. Further, any student who previously completed grade 12 and met all graduation requirements, other than the passing the exit exam, will be granted a diploma of graduation. SB 172 followed in the wake of SB 725, which exempted all current grade 12 students from having to pass the exit exam as a condition of graduating in the 2014-2015 school year.

Commencing with the 2003-2004 school year and each year thereafter, students completing grade 12 were required to pass the exit exam as a condition of receiving a diploma. The primary purpose of the exit exam was to improve student achievement in public high schools and to ensure that graduating students could demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The exit exam was aligned to the content standards for English language arts and mathematics that were developed pursuant to a package of education reform bills adopted in 1999. In 2010, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards, which led to the development of new statewide assessments that aligned with these newly adopted common core standards. The exit exam, aligned to the old standards, will need to be substantially revised to align with the common core standards.

SB 172 makes four significant changes to existing law. First, it suspends the administration of the exit exam for the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years. Second, it suspends the requirement that each student pass the exit exam as a condition of graduating from high school. Third, SB 172 requires the governing board of any school district, county office of education, or charter school, to grant a high school diploma of graduation to any student who completed grade 12 in the 2003-2004 school year, or any subsequent school year, and met all applicable graduation requirements but did not pass the exit exam. Fourth, the bill requires the State Superintendent to convene an advisory panel to provide recommendations on the continuation of a high school exit examination, and alternative pathways to satisfy high school graduation requirements.

It is estimated that in the current year, nearly 249,000 students could not pass the exit exam before the end of grade 12. Although it is unclear how many of these students did not graduate solely because they could not pass the exit exam, it is clear that many of those students will now be entitled to receive a high school diploma. In this way, SB 172 could open the door for students who were previously precluded from applying to most four-year universities and vocational training programs, joining the military, seeking federal financial aid, or applying for jobs that require a high school diploma. In the meantime, lawmakers and educators from around the State will attempt to determine if a new version of the exit exam can and/or will be implemented, or if the exit exam will be eliminated altogether.

If you have any questions regarding the implications of SB 172, or would like assistance in further understanding or complying with SB 172, please contact one of our [nine offices](#) located statewide. You can also visit our [website](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#), or download our [Client News Brief App](#).

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