



Passing the California High School Exit Exam

Have Recent Policies Improved Student Performance?

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SUMMARY

The California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) plays an important role in California's public school accountability program. Beginning in grade 10, students have multiple chances to pass the mathematics and English Language Arts components of this exam. If they do not pass both components by the end of grade 12, they will not receive a high school diploma.

Statewide analysis has shown that many students struggle with this exam and, despite modest improvements in recent years, about 1 in 16 fails to pass the exam before the end of grade 12.

To determine which types of interventions might be most effective, we considered two statewide policies and one local San Diego program designed to help struggling students pass the exam.

- Assembly Bill (AB) 128, which provides districts with funding for tutoring students, primarily in grades 11 and 12.
- Assembly Bill 347, which authorizes and provides funding to districts to provide at least two years of support services for students who failed to pass the CAHSEE by the end of grade 12.
- The San Diego Unified School District's program that offers a set of CAHSEE preparatory classes in mathematics and English Language Arts for students in grades 11 and 12 who have not yet passed the exam.

Our findings suggest that the tutoring provided under AB 128 does not help students pass the exam, and that the other two interventions we studied—extending student enrollment and providing prep classes directly related to the exam—help only a small percentage of students pass the test. We estimate that only 1.5 to 3 percent of the students who failed the CAHSEE in grade 10 later passed the test as a result of these interventions. In other words, the interventions unfortunately do not help the vast majority of those failing the CAHSEE in grade 10 to pass the test in a later grade.

Thus, we conclude that either new or improved interventions are needed in high school, or new interventions are needed to help students prepare for the exit exam well before they first undertake it in grade 10.

An earlier PPIC report by Zau and Betts (2008) demonstrated that forecasting models using data in earlier grades could accurately identify students at risk of failing the CAHSEE. The current report shows that data from as early as grade 2 are highly predictive, and thus districts could intervene in elementary school to assist students likely to have trouble with an exit exam many years in their future.

To help teachers and administrators identify at-risk students, we have developed a CAHSEE Early Warning Model. Individual districts can use this model to predict the probability of their own students passing the exit exam when they reach grade 10, using test scores from the California Standards Test (CST) and several other variables gathered in grades 6 or 8.

The CAHSEE Early Warning Model is available at
www.ppic.org/main/dataSet.asp?i=1234 and <http://sanderu.ucsd.edu/resources/index.html>

For the full report and related resources, please visit our publication page:
www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=1018