

The California High School Exit Exam: Gearing Up for The High-Stakes Test

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Introduction

The California High School Exit Exam

The concept of a high school exit exam is not new to California. In 1978, legislation was passed to establish minimum competency tests that would be locally developed and administered at elementary, middle and high school to assess progress toward graduation requirements and to keep parents apprised of students' progress. However in 1999, state policy makers wanted a more rigorous exam linked to the state's new academic standards. As a result, they passed legislation initiated by Governor Gray Davis that led to the creation of the California High School Exit Exam (known as CAHSEE).

The purpose of the CAHSEE is to ensure that students who graduate from high school can demonstrate competency in the state content standards for reading, writing and mathematics. Secondary goals of the CAHSEE are to get students, especially low-performing ones, to focus on academic areas and to get high schools to focus teachers and resources on areas of deficiency. Ultimately, the exam is meant to drive performance to a level that will allow students to be more successful in life, whether they enter the work world or go on to higher education.

California is not alone in requiring an exit exam; currently about half of the states have put one in place. Most are having similar experiences and share common concerns. Among those are questions about setting the level of difficulty, establishing adequate time for preparation and passing the exam, and aligning the exam with what is taught in the classroom. In addition, there are equity issues that range from the impact on special education students and English language learners to the fairness of high-stakes consequences for students who have spent their lives in under-performing schools, sometimes with under-qualified teachers.

Today, students who will graduate in 2004 – those who are currently juniors in high school – are in the pipeline to be the first class directly impacted by the exit exam. From their initial opportunities to take the exam, California has begun to compile data and explore the ramifications of CAHSEE.

October 9, 2002 Seminar

On October 9, 2002, the California Education Policy Seminar and the California State University Institute for Education Reform sponsored a discussion on the California High School Exit Exam and the experience high schools are having. The seminar, which brought together 50 educators, policy makers and other experts, featured an agenda centered on the California Academic Partnership Program's CAHSEE Grant Program. Participants included:

- California Academic Partnership Program staff: Dave Jolly, director; Alan Weisberg, consultant; and Jordan Horowitz, senior project director, Evaluation Research, WestEd.
- CAHSEE Grant Program recipients: Victor Jarels and Geno Flores from David Starr Jordan High School in Long Beach; Katrine Czajkowski from Chula Vista High School; and Carlos Cabana from San Lorenzo High School.
- Respondents: David W. Gordon, superintendent from the Elk Grove Unified School District and James Brown, superintendent from the Glendale Unified School District.
- Concluding speaker: Gerald Hayward, co-director, Policy Analysis for California Education.

This report documents the proceedings at the seminar. The presentations are summarized, along with highlights of the question-and-answer exchanges that were interspersed with the presentations.

(Comments made by individuals are summarized without quotation. All text should be regarded as paraphrasing and/or synthesizing what was actually said, and not as direct quotes attributable to the presenters or other participants.)

Presentation on CAPP's CAHSEE Grant Program

Dave Jolly has been director of the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) since 1997. CAPP is a state funded intersegmental organization that supports and studies the work of low-performing high schools and middle schools to improve student academic performance, increase college-going rates and increase the passage rate on California's High School Exit Exam. Prior to joining CAPP, Jolly worked for the California Department of Education managing intersegmental relations. He was a member of the High School Exit Exam Standards Panel appointed by the State Board. He has worked for the California Legislature as a consultant, served on the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing as the State Superintendent's representative and worked as a school district manager of categorical programs.

Alan Weisberg, CAPP consultant, is a former junior and senior high school teacher who has also served as the principal of a small, alternative high school. He has extensive experience developing career academies and other forms of smaller learning communities aimed at improving public high schools. Most of his career has been aimed at work to improve public high schools serving low-income students. He helps manage CAPP's nine-site CAHSEE grant program. He is a former member of the Nevada County and Nevada City school boards. Weisberg hold a bachelor's degree in history from UC Berkeley, and a doctorate in education from Stanford.

Jordan Horowitz, senior project director, Evaluation Research, WestEd, manages several large evaluation research projects including the community, agency and client effects of multi-agency health and social service collaboratives; effective partnerships between K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions; development of a national distance learning program; and the effects of the Los Angeles Unified School District's health and prevention programs. In the past, he directed evaluations of many prevention programs and coordinated several statewide surveys. He was a psychotherapist prior to beginning his research career.

The CAPP CAHSEE Grant Program

The California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) was created in 1983 with the goal of helping high schools prepare more students for college – particularly low-performing high schools. Besides working directly with specific schools, CAPP also endeavors to identify what

characteristics or elements help a school become successful in preparing students for college and then shares that information with high schools throughout the state. In other words, CAPP is not about trying to solve the state's education problems by putting resources into schools – we are about learning and then passing that information along to others.

When California created the high school exit exam – now known as CAHSEE – CAPP knew that the test would become a high priority for all high schools. The CAPP board decided to create a grant program that would support low-performing high schools as they prepared their students for the exam. CAPP identified five target elements as part of the grant guidelines:

- A culture of high expectations for all students.
- A rigorous curriculum with instruction that engages students.

- A school-wide focus on literacy and math.
- A system to help those who are failing the test.
- Involvement of partners (parents, institutions of higher education, etc.).

The program offered grants of \$100,000 in each of three years to help schools develop and implement strategies around these five elements.

From 25 applications, CAPP awarded grants to nine high schools, making choices that provided geographic diversity but also reflected the range of populations and Academic Performance Index (API) rankings at California's low-performing schools. The selected high schools were: Hoopa in Humboldt County, Chula Vista in San Diego County, Sacramento in Sacramento County, Lower Lake in Lake

County, San Lorenzo in Alameda County, Shafter in Kern County, Calexico in Imperial County, David Starr Jordan in Los Angeles County and Farmersville in Tulare County.

Although all of the schools are in the bottom half of the statewide API scores, they vary widely in many characteristics. In size, they range from tiny Hoopa High School in far Northern California with 275 students to Chula Vista High School near the Mexican border with 2,720 students. The percent of English language learners is zero at Hoopa High School, but 67.2 percent at Calexico High School. Lower Lake High School in Lake County is the only one of the nine with white students in the majority (73 percent). Others have higher numbers of Hispanic, black or – in the case of Hoopa – Native American students.

Using the proportion of students receiving free/reduced-price lunches as an indicator of low income, the schools range from the relatively affluent San Lorenzo High School in Alameda County (25 percent) to Farmersville High School in Tulare County (100 percent). The proportion of fully certified teachers varies, as well, from 71 percent at Calexico to 95 percent at Hoopa.

Three of the high schools are sharing their experiences in this seminar. CAPP selected them because, of the nine, they have key components in place: teachers who care and school leadership and a culture that supports helping students pass the test. Table 1 provides a look at the characteristics of these three schools:



The focus of the CAPP grant program is on both preparing students to pass the test when they take it the first time in the 10th grade and helping students beyond 10th grade if they fail the first time. In addition to providing grant money, CAPP consultants visit the sites regularly and promote interaction between the schools to build a learning community that embraces all nine sites.

Table 1 – Characteristics of Selected Schools in the CAPP CAHSEE Grant Program

	CAHSEE Testing*		2001 API	2001 Rank	Similar School Rank	Total Enrollment	Ethnicity			
	Math # tested/% passed	English # tested/% passed					Amer Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic
Chula Vista	668/ 54%	660/ 78%	578	4	5	2,720				
San Lorenzo	364/ 52%	384/ 73%	531	2	1	1,495				
David Starr Jordan	447/ 32%	403/ 60%	496	1	5	1,093 (Freshman Academy only)				
	% Eng Learners	% Free/ Reduced lunch	Fully Credentialed							
Chula Vista	24.7%	55%	87%	1%	2%	6%	72%	13%		
San Lorenzo	15.4%	25%	78%	1%	10%	22%	35%	21%		
David Starr Jordan	34.4%	52%	78%	0	10%	30%	48%	4%		

* estimated cumulative pass rate for 2001 and 2002

Following one full year of the project, WestEd – which is working closely with CAPP as both an evaluator and a technical assistance provider – surveyed math and language arts teachers at all nine high schools and their feeder middle schools participating in the project. In addition, WestEd conducted follow-up group interviews with both teachers and students. An excerpt from a report on these evaluation activities is provided in Appendix A.

One of the most important findings that can be drawn from the surveys and interviews is that teachers do not believe that standardized testing helps them improve instruction. There is anger that testing takes away from instructional time; there is exasperation that the tests are not diagnostic and results do not arrive in a timely enough fashion to be useful in shaping instructional practice; and there is frustration that teachers do not know how to use the test data or that they don't get timely help from the state or their district.

Plans for Addressing Failing Students

Q. If CAPP is seeing only weak plans for addressing the needs of students who fail CAHSEE in schools that it is working with, what is the likely status of such plans at high schools statewide?

Weisberg: No one really knows, but our guess would be that at many schools there are probably no plans in place. That does not mean high schools are not concerned; they are really worried about the impact of this exam. But many simply have not had the resources or time to make an effective response to failure rates. Others are making an effort. Calexico, for example, has created CAHSEE English and math classes specifically designed to help students pass the test. So plans are taking shape, but most lack any creativity or depth that would have a better chance of making them effective.

There is also a certain tension about the number and kind of tests high school students are expected to complete. Some have direct consequences for the students' future; some do not. Their importance to the school's API rankings may not be fully understood by students, and test fatigue becomes problematic for high schools and students.

Teachers are also not convinced that CAHSEE will survive. Many of them have seen multiple testing mandates come and go and are not certain how seriously to take this iteration. Yet despite skepticism, there is some positive sentiment regarding the accountability that CAHSEE imposes on both students and teachers.

Regarding the effect of CAHSEE on standards alignment, the test has forced some middle and high school articulation and provided impetus for aligning curricula around the standards. It appears that teachers' knowledge of the standards is not deep; for the most part, standards remain "on the wall" – posted as objectives – rather than incorporated within lessons. Textbooks claim to be aligned with the standards, but teachers have not noticed many changes other than notations in the margin to indicate what standards are being met by which material. Teachers point out that arriving at standards-based instruction takes time and hard work, but very little time and resources are devoted to the professional development that is needed to make this happen.

On the question of equity, teachers believe CAHSEE is fair to neither English language learners nor special education students. The test and the process do not provide accommodations for their special needs and the math portion is especially difficult for both populations. Teachers see the failure rate for these students, especially in special education, as evidence that testing them in the same manner as the general population is a problem.

In interviews, students seem aware but relatively unconcerned about the test at this time. They indicate that they will take it more seriously over time, when their deadline for passing is approaching. They express empathy and concern for their fellow students who may not pass. But at this point, they don't seem to know much about the content of the test or the process that the law provides.

Overall, school reform is moving more slowly in high schools than in other levels of education. Some high schools have vision statements; lots have special programs. But there is little comprehensive, thoughtful action being taken and limited creativity for addressing students who are not doing well. By and large, the plans for dealing with non-passers are weak. Typically, interventions involve summer school and double dosing (giving students two classes in one subject during each school day); most of it is remedial and not terribly exciting or engaging for students. These efforts should involve the very best teachers; instead, the usual pattern is for the best teachers to be leading Advanced Placement and Honors classes.

Impact on Year-Round Schools

Q. What are the special barriers faced by year-round schools?

Audience member: Two-thirds of the schools in Los Angeles Unified School District are on year-round schedules.

Because of the lack of flexibility on testing dates, there is a madhouse of scheduling students and having them all on campus at once. And in some cases, the retake date is set before students even know their results from the first round of testing. The anger level is very high among both teachers and students. The whole concept of year-round schools needs to be re-examined. The schedule has only 163 days but is justified by adding minutes on to each day; however, after a certain number of minutes in a day, students just shut down. The whole issue of equity comes into play when these students are tested this way.

CAPP believes that teachers need to lead improvement efforts, but the structures to make this happen are rarely there. There is a severe problem finding time for teachers to engage in the necessary in-depth professional development required to move toward standards-based instruction. However, it has become clear that the most progress in improving instruction occurs at schools with a culture of professional development. This professional development must occur at the school site to be most effective.

CAHSEE has had some positive effects. For one thing, it has focused attention on algebra and ensuring that all students understand algebraic concepts. This has brought middle schools into the equation because that is where many students are first exposed to algebra. In turn, this has improved articulation efforts between high schools and middle schools. In addition, CAHSEE has forced teachers to raise their expectations for all students, even for the lowest performers. Since low expectations are believed to be a significant barrier to improving student achievement in low-performing schools, this is a positive development.

Finally, the attention that CAHSEE has focused on high schools has created more interest in secondary school reform. Unfortunately, because of the pattern of passing scores with ethnic minorities doing far worse than white students, the test has also served to further highlight equity issues in California's schools.

Presentation of Panelists

Jordan Freshman Academy, David Starr Jordan High School

Victor Jarels is the site administrator for this all-freshman academy that feeds into David Starr Jordan High School in the Long Beach Unified School District. In its second year of operation, the academy has 910 students. Geno Flores is the district assessment director.

The Jordan Freshman Academy provides small learning communities, with 3x3 block scheduling. The students are doubled-dosed in English and reading, so that they have 110 minutes in the language arts. If they are performing at a low level in math, then they are double-dosed in that, as well.

The teachers are working hard on incorporating the state's academic content standards in the way they teach. The district has provided two coaches and the teachers have regular meetings to assess and compare student work, so assessment is becoming much stronger. Vertical teaming with the feeder middle schools occurs to align curricula and better meet student needs.

Yet another thing that we have done is look at the data to see what it can tell us about who is passing the CAHSEE and who is not. For example, Tables 2 and 3 indicate the relationship between students' performance on the Content Standards algebra and English/language arts tests in Spring 2000 and their subsequent ability to pass CAHSEE. The data confirm that those who rate as "below basic" or "far below basic" are more likely to fail the CAHSEE than those who are rated advanced, proficient or basic.

Table 2 – Relation Between Performance on 9th Grade Content Standards Algebra Test and CAHSEE Math Test

CS Algebra	Total	Passed HSE Math		Failed HSE Math	
	N	N	%	N	%
Advanced	186	186	100%	0	0
Proficient	105	104	99%	1	1%
Basic	106	101	95%	5	5%
Below Basic	250	204	82%	46	18%
Far Below Basic	98	76	78%	22	22%

Comparison of data, as in the tables above, can provide useful information about which students we should be focused on even before they take CAHSEE. However, it should be noted that when it comes to CAHSEE data, the results that are now given to teachers are not very useful in their current format. The data do not tell a teacher very much about what is going on with the students. It is far different with other tests; for instance, with the PSAT, hundreds of thousands of students will find out how they are likely to do on the SAT and will receive item-analysis data. But teachers and schools cannot explain or address what students do not know if they cannot see what the students got right and wrong on the test.

In addition, the time delay is too long between test administration and delivery of results. The test is taken in March and the results don't come out until May, which is late to be letting a parent know that their child has failed and needs to go to summer school. This is a multiple choice test; they ought to be able to turn the results around in three weeks and send them to the schools electronically, with an item analysis so that teachers can identify a student's weaknesses and begin to do something about them.

Another important issue is why we continue to test students who have already demonstrated mastery of the subject content on other state tests, such as STAR or Golden State examinations. If they show high skills and knowledge in the 9th grade based on the required STAR English-language arts standards tests or algebra standards test, why

Table 3 – Relation Between Performance on 9th Grade Content Standards English Test and CAHSEE English Test

CS English	Total	Passed HSE Eng		Failed HSE Eng	
	N	N	%	N	%
Advanced	327	327	100%	0	0
Proficient	903	892	99%	11	1%
Basic	1592	1498	94%	94	6%
Below Basic	1043	578	55%	465	45%
Far Below Basic	499	6	1%	493	99%

do they have to take the CAHSEE test a year later? We believe that the test should count for 9th graders; that would mean that if they pass, they can use their class time for other electives rather than continuing to prepare for the test. Another question is if they pass CAHSEE and demonstrate that they have a core body of knowledge, then why do we need to have them take the STAR exam in 10th and 11th grade? The essence of SB 233 was to reduce redundancy in testing; there is already too much testing of high school students in California.

Chula Vista High School

Katrine Czajkowski began teaching in Sweetwater Union High School District schools in 1990 after graduating from Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. An interdisciplinary degree in science, technology and international affairs did not satisfy requirements for a secondary teaching credential so she took the PRAXIS subject matter tests in mathematics, English and social studies. Credentialed to teach those subjects in grades 7-12, Czajkowski is currently the Categorical Coordinator and a resource teacher at Chula Vista High School. She has completed a master's degree in educational leadership along with a Preliminary Administrative Credential and a Ph.D. in policy studies. She currently directs CAPP's SMART (Standards Mastery and Responsive Teaching) project.

Chula Vista High School has 2,750 students in a high school that was built to hold 1,600 students. The scheduling is traditional so students have six or seven periods every day, although there is a mandatory 35-minute reading period every day. Each teacher has about 175 students.

At Chula Vista, about 51 percent passed both the English/language arts and math CAHSEE; 23 percent passed only the English portion; 3 percent passed only the math portion; and 23 percent failed both sections. From the experience at this school, math was difficult for both English language learners and English speakers. By and large, it was much easier for students to pass the test if their home language was English rather than Spanish.

In summary, the CAPP project has really helped Jordan become focused on what we need to do. Our teachers believe the CAHSEE test is both fair and doable, although we do have concerns about making the data from the test more useful. Even though we are a school with an API ranking in the 1st decile, we don't focus on that but instead try to be instructional minded. Both CAPP and CAHSEE are helping us do that.

Time for Teachers

Q. How do teachers in your districts find time to perform thoughtful work and data analysis?

Czajkowski: Teachers who are teaching five periods a day are really challenged to do anything that gives more meaning to their work. We have pullout days where teachers go off campus and a substitute takes over their class. We also use CAPP funds to "buy out" some teachers for one period and assign them as resource teachers who can work with the other teachers on issues and alignment.

Gordon: We have coaches who are on full-time release and department heads who have at least one period of release each day. We also have a late-start day so teachers can meet within their departments for an hour and 20 minutes each week. None of this is perfect, but it helps.

Cabana: Our school did not want to take time away from instruction, so our teachers carve collaboration time out of our personal lives. We have two structures that help. Our schedule is designed so that every beginning teacher can observe a veteran teacher teaching the same class. And then for algebra, we have a summer week meeting to discuss the course as a whole and then weekly meetings for planning after school. We also have a strong philosophy that every student can learn, and that if a student is not learning it is our responsibility. We will not hire a math teacher that does not have that philosophy.

One of the things that we have experimented with is teaching math and science during the summer. In our district, no one had ever been allowed to take Algebra I in summer school because people were convinced that students could not learn what they needed to in four hours a day over six weeks. But we wanted to see what would happen if we tried it – if we did not screen anyone out, but simply let students self-select to take algebra in six weeks. We had a teacher and two college students, both bilingual math majors, as assistants. The students who signed up were motivated, but not top-line students, with GPAs from 1.5 to 3.2. The result? Sixty-nine percent passed the class, mastering the concepts as well if not better than students going through the regular class.

Similarly, biology and chemistry had never been offered in the summer. This was important because we noticed that for students falling short of the A-G requirements for the University of California system, the most common credits missing were in science. So we made science available during the summer. The pass rate for biology was 83 percent; the results were similar for chemistry.

Another area of focus has been parent involvement. One of the school's tutors, a UC San Diego math major, acts as exit exam coordinator and follows a three-tier intervention plan with about 250 students. There's a phone call to the parent, followed by meetings with the parent and the student to discuss the importance of the exam and raise the level of awareness.

One thing we try to avoid is sticking labels on students because labels can be a very powerful detriment in high school. Some of our students who were having difficulty were enrolled in a very expensive intervention program for reading. But when we looked at the test results and matched them to those participating in the reading intervention, they did less well in terms of score gain than students not enrolled in the program. The program was a good one, designed by literacy experts, but the labeling function was at work and undermined what students were able to achieve.

Among the conclusions that we have drawn:

- The question that should be asked is what are the most important skills or knowledge that a student must master? This is important because we cannot teach everything and they cannot learn everything. But teachers are left confused when faced with STAR, SAT 9 and the exit exam, each with different requirements. A norm-referenced tests is especially frustrating since it does not really tell us anything about what a student can do. So teachers can at least turn to the CAHSEE as something with a curricular focus.
- We also need to examine how well must students be expected to know or do things. When is it good enough? We need common assessments and evaluation criteria built around minimum competencies. That way we can arrive at assessments that are parallel and do item analysis on test results to see where students need help.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to answer how teachers can work together to develop educational programs that enable students to succeed. We need to support teacher leadership by providing them with the forum and structure to address instructional issues. The need for professional development and horizontal interaction among teachers cannot be overstated.

San Lorenzo High School

Carlos Cabana, project co-director and math department co-chairman, has taught 8th-12th grade mathematics at San Lorenzo High School for the past 13 years. He is the author and editor of a variety of 6th-12th grade curricula, including the College Prep Mathematics Algebra II, Precalculus and AP Calculus books. He and the San Lorenzo High Math Department have successfully untracked their course offerings, stressing teacher collaboration, high expectations for students and curriculum reform that relies heavily on cooperative learning. This approach has consistently reduced failure rates while dramatically increasing the number of students who take advanced courses.

San Lorenzo High School is a typical urban-fringe high school, richly diverse in student population, serving largely working class and immigrant families. We are typical also in that standardized test scores are low. Despite that, San Lorenzo High is a remarkable school because we have a staff that is highly collaborative and deeply committed to these students; a staff that takes ownership and responsibility for equity in education.

We have high expectations and the students reflect that. The classrooms are full at lunchtime, with students visiting teachers for help or just hanging out with favorite teachers. Hallways are boisterous during release time because students in general are happy to be there. They know they are learning at our school. And despite low standardized test scores, there are demonstrations of success – such as the 30 percent of seniors who are taking Advanced Placement calculus. We invite anyone who wonders how an outstanding school can nevertheless have low test scores to visit San Lorenzo and see what our students and teachers are doing.

One of the questions that people may ask is why teachers have such negative feelings about standardized testing. Most of us hold ourselves accountable for educating students. When we started looking at student achievement in our school, we identified three issues that needed to be worked on: attendance, homework and reading. We had students who simply weren't coming to school; we had students who couldn't or wouldn't do their homework; and for most of these students, reading was not a daily activity. These three issues got in the

way of learning – not of higher test scores, but learning. As teachers, we do not see a match between standardized testing and those three issues.

Alternatives to the Exit Exam

Q. What impact would the exit exam have if there were no consequences – and what alternatives are there?

Cabana: We don't know if the students who do not pass CAHSEE would not have graduated anyway. But frankly, if the test is not high stakes, then it will not be treated as important by anyone – not the students and not the schools. That's what happens now with students and STAR. But there should be an alternative to a single high-stakes test. We need to find a clearly compelling set of ways for students to demonstrate their readiness to go to college or enter the workforce. For example, students who pass AP exams, or who have a high enough GPA, or who complete UC/CSU entrance requirements have clearly demonstrated the extent of their learning. We shouldn't just look at other tests, but look at completely different measures, like senior projects. High schools that are trying to make innovative changes should be able to demonstrate the impact on student achievement with means other than a multiple choice test. Possibly with some state guidelines, parents and districts should be able to choose what demonstrates that its diploma means something.

The resentment of teachers comes from what they must do to address test scores. For example, one of our feeder middle schools had the lowest scores in the district. They were doing everything they could with curricular reform, but the test scores were not reflecting their efforts. So every Wednesday, they devoted the class time to standardized test preparation. Imagine their anger at having to spend almost a fifth of the school year teaching children to take multiple choice

tests. The result is that the standardized test scores went up. There was little difference in curriculum – in fact, they had to make curricular compromises – but the students became better test takers. That is very frustrating for teachers who are committed to social justice and doing right by students who have been underserved by the education system for years.

Another question that may be asked is why there are not more creative efforts to help those who have not passed CAHSEE. Creativity, however, is not the issue. We all know that test prep is the most efficient way to raise test scores, so creativity is actually discouraged by test pressure. Students spend 90 minutes a day for nine weeks learning test taking strategies, like throwing out the least likely answers, drawing pictures of fractions, etc. The biggest obstacle to this approach is the students themselves. They don't want to simply learn test-taking strategies because they know what real learning is about. They don't want to draw a picture of a fraction so they can quickly guess the answer; they want to know how to work out the problem.

Confusion about What is Tested

Q. Isn't the degree to which faculty are able to make changes in instructional practices as a result of test data hampered by not knowing what is being tested?

Cabana: There is confusion. The math standards, for example, are framed incredibly broadly and yet there are only a small number of questions on the test. So looking at the CAHSEE blueprint in no way helps me predict what specific mathematics students will be held responsible for. Even the vocabulary that is used may be a problem if the student knows the concept by a different name but does not recognize the wording on the test. To use a real example, a student may understand how a graph can portray two quantities that are directly related, but may not know that the technical term for this is positive correlation – and so may not recognize the correct answer. But nowhere in the standards or the blueprint does it specify that students must know this exact phrase.

The students are angry about the test, and in many cases their anger is appropriate. One student who moved here from Russia two years ago speaks three languages; plays soccer; goes to the library to read recreationally in a language that he has difficulty understanding. He is about to not get a diploma because he will not pass the English portion of the test. Another special education student has a disability but has found ways to be effective in school; she knows herself as a learner. But she may not pass the exit exam, nor will many of the classmates who she sees around her in special education classes. Those are the real faces of real students who are being affected by this exam.

Finally, it is important to look at what the statewide statistics are telling us (see Table 4). When you look at passing rates like 30 percent for Hispanics and 28 percent for blacks, you have to realize that as a matter of public policy we are saying that only these percentages of certain student populations will receive diplomas. It does not matter whose fault it is; we need to recognize that the impact of this public policy is that large numbers of certain groups will fail.

Some have said that the good news is that the system is being focused on student achievement because of these test results. But what is really happening is that the system is being focused on test taking, not learning. Learning time is being gobbled up by test preparation. That is not what education should be about.

Table 4 – Estimated Overall Cumulative Passing Rates for CAHSEE March 2001 through May 2002

Group	Number Enrolled	% of Enrollment	Number Passing	% of Group Passing
Class of 2004	459,588 (est)	100%	220,344	48%
Male	236,533	51%	112,792	48%
Female	223,055	49%	107,450	48%
Black	38,240	8%	10,548	28%
Asian	39,021	8%	27,267	70%
Hispanic	184,120	40%	54,514	30%
White (non-Hisp)	175,797	38%	113,429	65%
English learner	77,446	17%	14,388	19%
Special Ed	47,169	10%	6,019	13%

Presentation of Responders

David Gordon

David W. Gordon is superintendent of the Elk Grove Unified School District. The district has 52,500 students in 51 schools, covers 320 square miles in Sacramento County, and has an annual budget of \$370 million. Gordon began his career as an elementary school teacher and also worked for the California Department of Education for 17 years. He has served as an Associate in Education at Harvard, a visiting scholar at Stanford and a visiting professor at the University of California, Riverside. He was recently appointed to President Bush's Commission on Excellence in Special Education.

There are several things to keep in mind when we talk about the results we are trying to achieve. One is that in other states, they are investing far more resources in education. If we had the level of funding that a New York district has, for example, the budget in Elk Grove would be \$700 million, not \$300 million. To some extent, we are limited by the resources we have no matter how hard people work. Another factor is that there is a weaker structure in high schools, with teachers focused on their own areas. That makes reform and focused strategies for addressing issues like CAHSEE more difficult.

Some observations about what has been said:

- The slow turnaround on providing scores is not just embarrassing, it is unworkable. We need the scores back faster or the state should find someone else to do the scoring.
- There is a large need for technical assistance statewide so that schools can understand what the data means and so that more creative approaches to assisting students can be developed and implemented.
- We should return to giving the test in 9th grade. This will provide students with extra time to pass the test. Even though some may not have had all the material, it still gives them one more opportunity.
- In hindsight, we should have selected to use end-of-course exams like the New York Regents exam. A group of teachers write the high-quality test in the summer and then after each examination, the test is released and a new one is written. That provides the opportunity for better analysis of test results.

- CAHSEE should be integrated with higher education testing. If English and math placement tests were taken care of in high school instead of at the college freshmen level, then the tests would be more meaningful for students.
- The “big gorilla” in all of this is the potential for a lawsuit from a student who has not passed the test and had teachers who were not fully credentialed, particularly in math. The argument will be that it is not fair to hold the students to these standards if we have not given them the opportunity to learn through the access to qualified teachers. In our district, we have 3,000 teachers and only 35 do not have full certification – but there are some math teachers in there.
- The results at Chula Vista are important because the teachers and the unions are working together there to create a can-do culture. They've pulled together to teach in summer school and have decided they will not let the students fail. That is very important and an example that other organizations should follow. The California Teachers Association would be doing a better service if they would stop talking about how bad testing is and begin to encourage the creation of a culture like that in Chula Vista.

In Elk Grove, we are working on a variety of initiatives to address the exit exam. Beyond fostering teaming among high schools, we are making sure that teachers, counselors and principals have access to data through a web-based system – even though there is not enough data to make this as valuable as it should be.

We are also working hard to train teachers to embed the standards in their instruction. The principals are particularly important; if they do not understand the standards and how to supervise their implementation, then they cannot help teachers through modeling.

We are also sending instructional coaches into the high schools to help with literacy and math problems. It has been very well received. With all due respect for the UC professional development projects, they are wonderful but they do not do much for high school level teachers.

Most importantly, we really need to have a common message around the state that this is a job that has to be done. What we have been doing in the past has not done the job of making sure that all students graduate with a core set of knowledge. That has to change.

James Brown

James R. Brown is superintendent of Glendale Unified School District. The district has 30,000 students, 72 percent English language learners and 49 percent receiving free or reduced price lunches. Brown is co-chair of the California High School Exit Exam Committee, playing a lead role in making content recommendations for the test. Formerly, he has served as superintendent for Palo Alto Unified School District, Lompoc Unified School District, Cambria Union Elementary School District and Coast Union High School District. He has a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University and a master's degree from the University of Kansas.

Although there is a level of anger about testing in general, that needs to be separated from the high school exit exam. The woes of testing should not be laid at the door of CAHSEE. High schools need a demonstrable measure that everyone can rely on that says a certain amount of achievement has occurred by the end of high school. CAHSEE does that.

In Glendale, our cumulative pass rate for the Class of 2004 is 80.5 percent in English and 71.6 percent in math. So we have a group of students who are failing, but the gap between English and math is narrowing.


There are some positives worth noting when we listen to discussions around the state about CAHSEE. The pass rate of the exam is going up with each administration of the test; most districts can say that there are more students passing now than two years ago. Instruction and curriculum in high schools are gradually becoming aligned with the standards, and that's positive. Some schools need help, but alignment is being addressed. If we assume that the test has some relationship to what the students ought to know, then these are positive developments.

A critical problem with the test is not the content but the timeline. It is unreasonable to hold students accountable for the results, given the complexity of the issues with which California's education has to deal. This is not just a high school issue, but a K-12 issue. We all know that progress is occurring more rapidly in elementary schools. We are confident that as students go through the changes that have been made in elementary school and then work through the middle and high school years, down the road most will pass the test. But that is not the case with current students in high school who have not benefited from the improved performance in the lower grades.

Impressive Passing Rate

Q. Glendale currently has very high pass rates. To what do you attribute that, and since pass rates are high, why do you believe you need more time before the exit exams impacts graduation?

Brown: A large part of the success in math was setting up the algebra and geometry requirement before this test was put in place. We have also made a heavy investment in professional development in math. Second, we have developed a strong teacher leadership role so teachers can work with other teachers and also participate in professional development. Third, it is important for districts that are getting good results to share with other districts what is working – because as we get down to the smaller numbers of students who are not passing, we are facing some of the most difficult and challenging students. Even though we are doing well, we still do not know how many students are not going to make it. I think the state as a whole can make it to 85 percent. But the state as a whole needs more time. This is a very diverse state and we need time for resources to work through the system.



Another problem is the level of resources. They simply are not there at an adequate level for every district to do what is necessary. If you look at a district in Glendale, Palo Alto and a rural area, each will have a very, very different level of resources to invest in what needs to be done.

In Glendale, we are using standards resource teachers in high schools and these people are having a very positive impact. They can work collaboratively with their peers, providing coaching. But they have to be freed up from their own classrooms a significant portion of the day in order for the collaboration to occur, and that takes resources.

From our experiences, there are difficulties with the English language learner population. Because there is a test in English, students have to have fluency and command of English. Given time, English language learners will make adjustments and will do well on the test. However, there is the question of fairness for those who are new to the language.

In Glendale, we've learned the importance of requiring algebra and geometry. Glendale put those in place as graduation requirements two years before the exit exam began. We offer both two- and three-semester classes; for some students, slowing the course down really seems to help. There are difficulties in offering math intervention after school and during the summer. There is a critical shortage of teachers, especially in math and science, who want to work during those times. That makes it all the more important to help the students get through the course the first time so that intervention is not required.

We are optimists that over time the exit exam will work well. But we are also convinced that the timeline needs to be postponed by a minimum of three to four years so that the changes in the lower grades have a chance to take hold and statewide inequities in the level of preparation and distribution of resources can be addressed.

Conclusion

Gerald C. Hayward is co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), an independent policy research center that provides analysis and assistance to California policymakers, educational leaders and others. PACE is affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University. He is also a partner in Management, Analysis and Planning, an education consulting firm. Prior to coming to PACE, he served for six years as deputy director of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, at UC Berkeley. He also served as Chancellor of the California Community Colleges and prior to that served for a decade as principal consultant to the California State Senate Committees on Education and Finance. Hayward is a former teacher and administrator in California's public schools.

Several common themes emerge from the discussion about the impact of CAHSEE on high schools and students. One is that there is a disconnect between policy and implementation. For the most part, reforms like CAHSEE have been top-down policy driven by unrest about the quality of education. There has been far less focus on how such policies play out locally. The seminar participants reflect a sense of frustration about the lack of connection between the purposes behind the test and the action of how it is implemented. This indicates a need over the next few years to work on making that connection valid because the people ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the policy – the teachers – have to believe in it for the test to be effective.

Two other concerns are evident: lack of time and lack of resources. Educators see a high-stakes, high-consequences test but feel that they are being given only low levels of resources to deliver what needs to be accomplished. One solution offered has been to delay the date for the test having an impact on whether students receive diplomas. However, many have observed that if the test impact is delayed, high schools will not take the exam seriously and may further delay necessary reforms until the deadline is once again upon them. The tension between the reality of the signal that the test sends to the system and the inadequacy of the response is an issue that has to be resolved politically.

A positive note has been the degree of regional cooperation and sharing of information that is taking place. A number of high schools are working together and leveraging resources; those kinds of approaches need to be pursued and encouraged.

Other areas, however, need to be addressed. There needs to be a better effort to ensure that schools and teachers have the data they need to make a meaningful response to the test results. The timeliness of receiving results can be improved. And the number of tests given during the high school years should be examined and addressed.

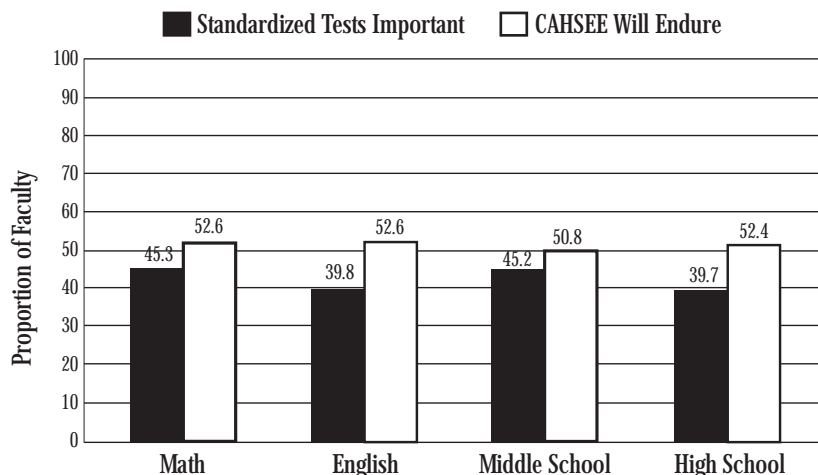
CAHSEE is a new initiative and, like most new initiatives, is still in an evolving stage. Whether or not this specific test survives, many believe that with today's heightened concern about education the concept of an exit exam is here to stay. The challenge is to address the issues that hold CAHSEE back from being effective in both assessing student achievement and motivating meaningful school reform.

Appendix A

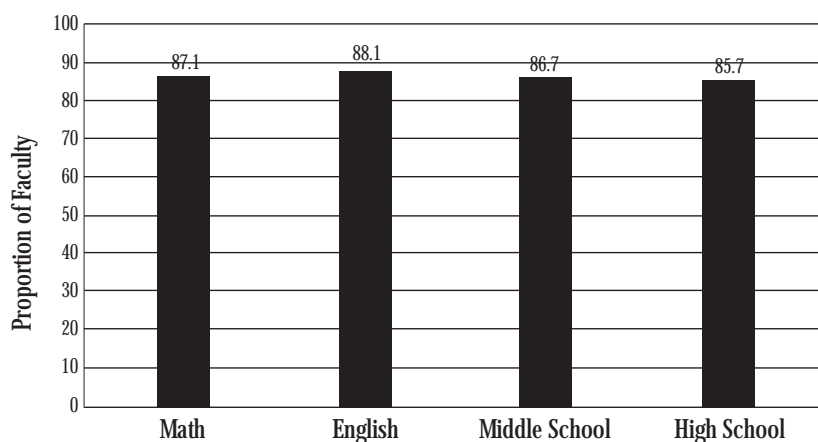
Excerpt from California Academic Partnership Program Evaluation Survey Findings for the CAHSEE Projects

1. What do teachers think about the CAHSEE?

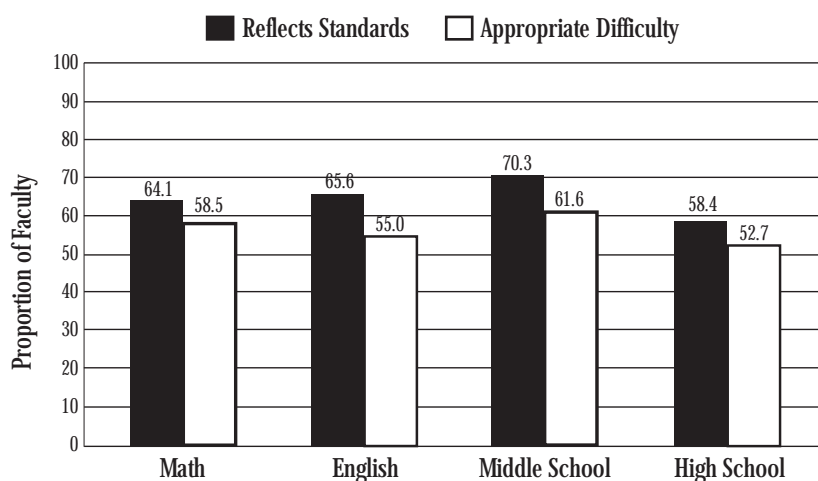
1A. According to the survey of faculty at CAPP CAHSEE Project Schools, less than half the respondents believe standardized statewide tests are an important part of a comprehensive assessment program. A slightly greater proportion believe the CAHSEE will endure as a high school diploma requirement in California.



1D. A large majority of teachers believe they teach the standards covered in the CAHSEE in the classes they teach that are related to the exam.

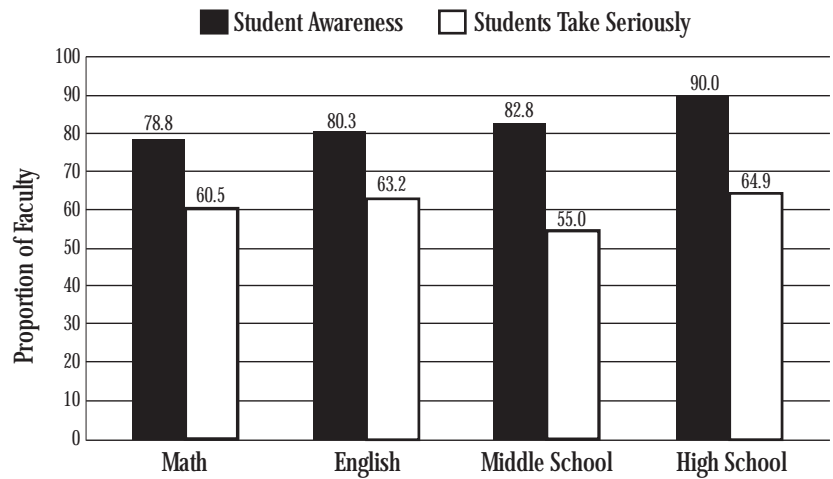


1E. Generally, faculty believe the exam reflects standards students should learn. Most respondents do believe the exam is at an appropriate level of difficulty, but by a slim margin.



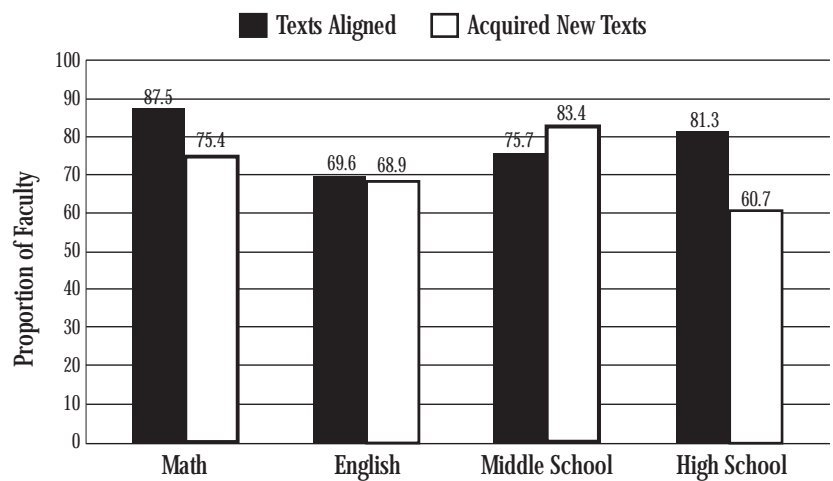
2. How do high school students feel about the test?

2A. Approximately four out of five respondents to the faculty survey believe their students are aware of the CAHSEE and its relationship to earning a high school diploma. Generally, fewer respondents believe their students take the CAHSEE seriously.

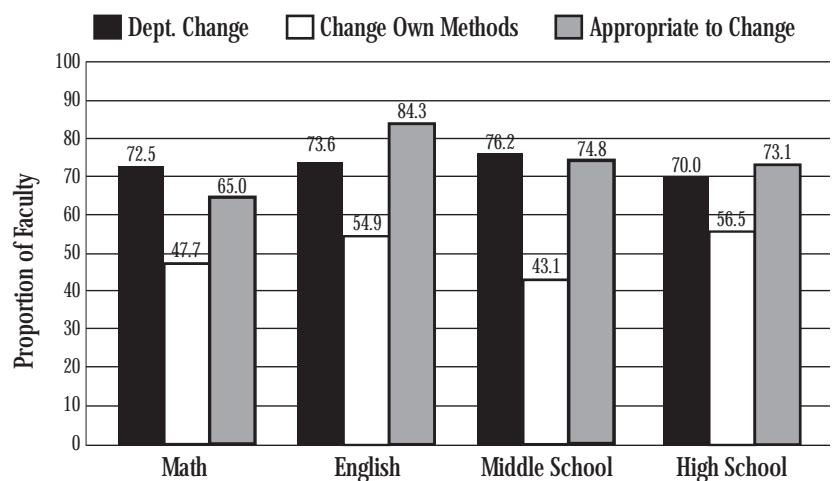


3. Are there signs that the CAHSEE is affecting instruction?

3A. Most teachers believe the textbooks they use are aligned to the California state standards. Most teachers also report they acquired new texts to ensure alignment.

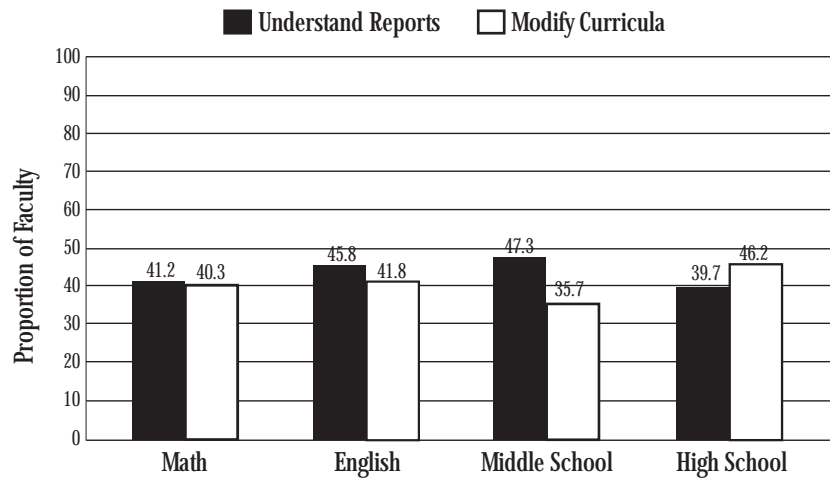


3C. Most faculty report classroom practices in their department. Far fewer report using student results from the CAHSEE to modify their own instructional practices. Most teachers believe it is appropriate for them to change their instructional practices in response to the exam.



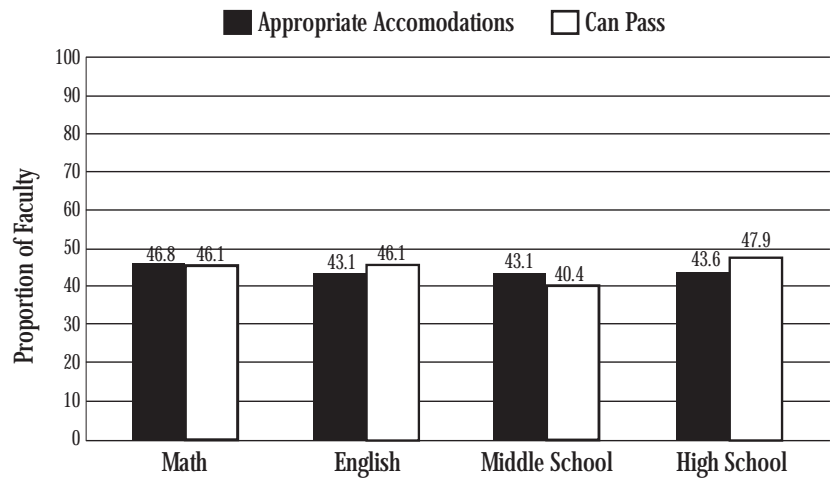
4. Is there adequate professional development available to teachers to help them prepare their students for success on the CAHSEE?

4B. Less than half the respondents received professional development regarding how to understand the CAHSEE student reports or on how to use CAHSEE results to modify curricula.

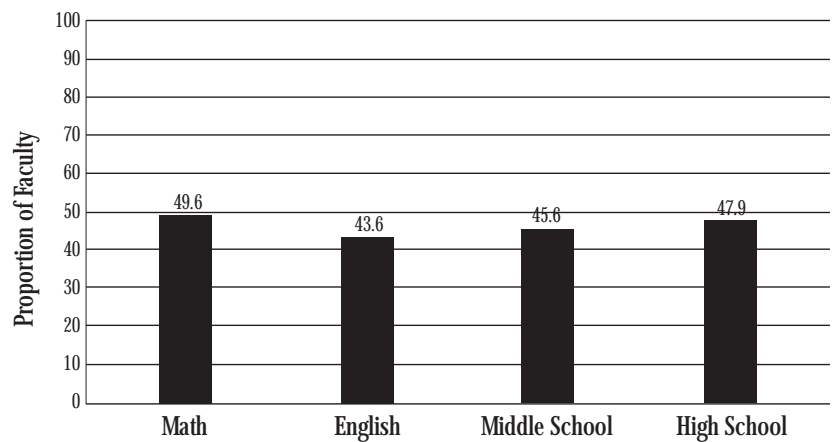


5. What insights are there for ELL and special needs students?

5A. Fewer than half the respondents believe that appropriate accommodations have been made for students with special needs taking the CAHSEE. Furthermore, slightly fewer believe that with accommodations students with special needs can pass the exam.

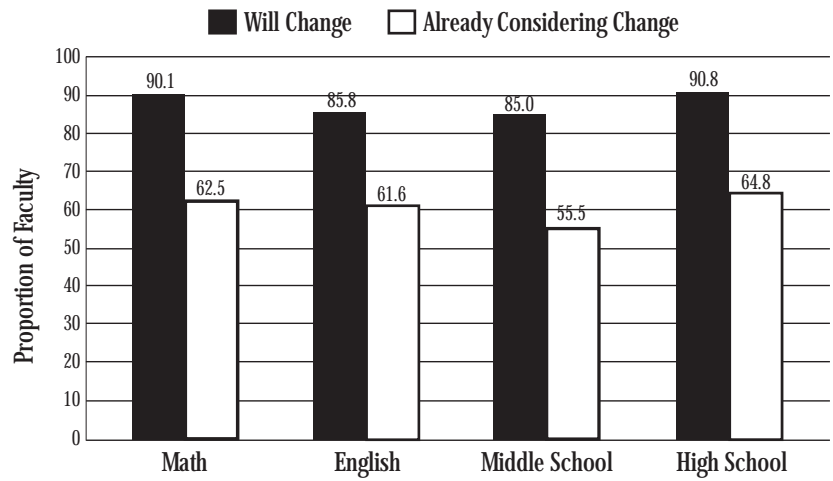


5B. Fewer than half the faculty respondents believe it is appropriate to expect all English Language Learners to pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a high school diploma.



6. To what extent does CAHSEE implementation impact broader efforts at reforming California's high schools?

6A. Almost all faculty believe their school will make operational changes (scheduling, curriculum, professional development, etc.) in response to results from the CAHSEE. Fewer report their school already is considering structural changes such as banking time, small learning communities, internships and mentorships, etc. in response to the CAHSEE.



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