

- 5) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to issue a California high school equivalency certificate and an official score report to any person who has not completed high school and who meets the following requirements:
- a) Is a resident of California or member of armed services assigned to duty in California.
 - b) Has taken all or a portion of a general educational development test that has been approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) and that is administered by a testing center approved by the California Department of Education (CDE), with a score determined by SBE to be equal to the standard of performance expected from high school graduates.
 - c) Meets one of the following:
 - i) Is at least 18 years old.
 - ii) Would have graduated from high school had he or she remained in school and followed the usual course of study toward graduation.
 - iii) Is at least 17 years of age, has accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit, and is confined to a state or county hospital or to an institution maintained by a state or county correctional agency.
 - iv) Is at least 17 years of age, has accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit prior to enrollment in a specified academic program, and has successfully completed the academic program offered by a dropout recovery high school, as specified. (EC § 51420)

Fees

- 6) Authorizes CDE to charge a fee for each high school *proficiency* exam application in an amount sufficient to recover the costs of administering the exam and related requirements. Existing law prohibits the CDE from charging the fee for the high school *proficiency* exam to a foster youth or to a homeless child or youth under the age of 25 years who can verify his or her status as a homeless child or youth. (EC § 48412)
- 7) Authorizes the SPI to charge a one-time fee (established by the SBE) to people taking the high school *equivalency* exam in an amount sufficient to pay the cost of administering the exam and related requirements, and for the cost of providing services related to the completion of an equivalency exam. Existing law prohibits a contractor or testing center from charging a separate fee to an examinee who is a foster youth or to a homeless child or youth under the age of 25 years who can verify his or her status as a homeless child or youth. Existing law caps the fee at \$20. (EC § 51421)

ANALYSIS

This bill provides that the high school proficiency exam is to cover four specified subject areas, and authorizes the fee for the high school equivalency exam to be increased. Specifically, this bill:

High school proficiency exam

- 1) Provides for the awarding of a certificate of proficiency in the four content areas of English language arts, history-social science, mathematics, and science.
- 2) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to review existing tests that assess the four content areas to determine if any meet the criteria established by the California Department of Education (CDE).
- 3) Broadens the reasons for which a person may take the exam at a time other than the regularly scheduled exam by deleting the specific reasons in statute (persons whose religious convictions or physical handicaps prevent their attending one of the regular exams).

High school equivalency exam

- 4) Strikes the one-time nature of the exam fee, and increases the cap of \$20 to up to \$40 per person.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “The current test for the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) will no longer be supported by the test company after 2018. The California Department of Education (CDE) needs to put out a Request for Proposal to identify a new test for the CHSPE. This bill would allow the CDE to update the test for CHSPE by requiring the Superintendent of Public Instruction to consider existing tests that assess English language arts, mathematics, science, and history-social science.

The statutory administrative fee cap for the high school equivalency program has not been changed since 1981. The State Board of Education approved the last administrative fee increase from \$12 to \$20 in 2004. Since 2004, the costs and workload for administering the program has increased. Currently, state expenditures exceed the revenues collected from the administrative fee. In addition, the state has not provided any funds to cover the costs of the fee waivers for homeless and foster youth.”

- 2) ***High school proficiency vs high school equivalency.*** This bill relates to both the high school proficiency exam and the high school equivalency exam.

The high school *proficiency* exam may be taken by a student who is at least 16 years of age and has been enrolled in grade 10 for at least one year. The CDE has designated the CHSPE as the test by which students may verify proficiency in basic skills.

The high school *equivalency* exam may be taken by a person who is at least 18 years of age, or at least 17 years of age and has accumulated fewer than 100 units of high school credit and is incarcerated or has completed an academic program offered by a dropout recovery high school.

The State Board of Education has approved the use of three high school equivalency tests:

- a) The General Educational Development Test (GED).
 - b) The High School Equivalency Test (HiSET).
 - c) The Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC).
- 3) ***Contract for the high school proficiency exam.*** The California Department of Education (CDE) is currently under contract with the Sacramento County Office of Education for the administration of the CHSPE; this contract will expire in June 2018. The test vendor has notified the CDE that it is not going to support the test (update the test questions, for example) once the contract expires.

As a result, there will not be an exam to use for high school proficiency after June 2018. This bill requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to review existing exams that contain the specified four content areas to determine if any can be used for purposes of high school proficiency.

Current law does not specify the subject areas in which a student is to demonstrate proficiency (rather, the CDE has developed standards of competency in basic skills which only cover English language arts and mathematics). This bill adds science and history-social science, thereby increasing the possibility for an existing exam, such as a high school equivalency exam, to be deemed appropriate for use as a high school proficiency exam.

- 4) ***Fee for high school equivalency exam.*** This bill increases the cap on the state administrative fee for the high school equivalency exam, from up to \$20 to up to \$40, and removes the one-time nature of the fee. This bill does not alter the fee that may be charged for the high school proficiency exam.

The fee for the high school equivalency exam is used to pay for the cost of administering the exam and related statutory requirements, and for the cost of providing services related to the completion of an equivalency exam (scoring and awarding of proficiency certificate, and waivers for students who are homeless or foster youth). As noted by the author, this fee has not changed since 2004, and no funding has been provided to cover the costs of the fee waivers for homeless and foster youth.

Currently, examinees pay the \$20 fee once and can retake the equivalency exam (any portion not passed) into perpetuity. The changes proposed by this bill would require an examinee to pay up to \$40 for taking the equivalency exam (with up to two retakes), and subsequently to retake any portion of the exam (up to three additional times).

Existing law prohibits an exam fee from being charged to examinees who are homeless or foster youth, as defined, but does not exempt this population from paying the one-time \$20 state administrative fee. Could increasing the administrative fee up to \$40 preclude some homeless or foster youth from taking the high school equivalency exam?

- 5) **Reimbursements vs absorbing costs.** Existing law authorizes the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to use surplus funds in the Special Deposit Fund Account to reimburse contractors for the loss of fees (for waivers of fees for homeless and foster youth). Existing law provides that a contract for the provision of high school equivalency exams must require that any contracting party accept all examinees, including those entitled to a fee waiver.

Existing law also requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to include a provision in all memorandums of understanding with contractors that if the surplus funds in the Special Deposit Fund Account are depleted, the ongoing costs of a fee waiver is to be absorbed by the contractor. According to the CDE, the 2017-18 year-end balance for the Special Deposit Fund Account and revenues will be insufficient to support the administration of the high school equivalency program as well as the homeless and foster youth waivers for the 2018-19 fiscal year. Based on revenue estimates and expenditures, the Special Deposit Fund Account for the 2018-19 fiscal year will be depleted with a negative year-end fund balance.

- 6) **Report on equivalency exam.** Existing law requires the SPI to report to the Legislature by December 1, 2018, on all of the following:
- a) The number of homeless youth and foster youth that took a high school equivalency exam in each of the 2016, 2017, and 2018 calendar years.
 - b) The impact of the opportunity to take an equivalency exam at no cost on the number and percentage of homeless youth and foster youth taking an equivalency exam.
 - c) The estimated number of homeless youth and foster youth who may take a high school equivalency exam in future years.
 - d) Recommendations for a permanent funding source to cover the costs of waived fees.
 - e) The annual and projected administrative cost to the CDE.
 - f) The annual and projected reimbursement to the exam contractor.
- 7) **Related legislation.** AB 1202 (Baker) adds a student who is exceptionally gifted to the eligibility criteria for taking the high school proficiency exam, and specifically authorizes a student under 16 years of age who receives a certificate of proficiency to be admitted to attend a community college if the community college district determines specified conditions are met. AB 1202 was never heard.

SUPPORT

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson

OPPOSITION

None received

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