



The State Bar *of California*

Office of Admissions Update

Donna S. Hershkowitz, Chief of Admissions/Legislative Director

Board of Trustees Meeting, May 22–23, 2025

February 2025 Update



Scoring Review, Completed and Planned



Completed

- **Results Released** and issues identified
- Mismatch exam responses (3 applicants)
- **Retake issues:** Applicants mistakenly got zeros if they retook essays 4 or 5. Not all eligible applicants got imputed scores (9 applicants)

Impact:

- ✓ Four applicants notice of status change from FAIL to PASS

Announced

Underway

Notes Fields:

- ✓ All content in Notes Fields not transmitted to graders for some applicants
- ✓ Transmission corrected
- ✓ Regrading underway

May 2025

Planned

- ✓ **Privileged independent third-party will be retained.** Review scoring for all unsuccessful candidates. Review TA concerns.

TBD

May 30 Meeting, Committee of Bar Examiners



**Changes to
second-read
methodology
("best of")**



**New appeals
process for
those that
"almost"
passed**



**Partial retakes,
July**



**TA
granted vs
provided**



**Other
remedies as
warranted**



Petition to the Supreme Court

- Pursuant to Committee of Bar Examiners and Board Action (by May 23)
 - Expansion and extension of the Provisional Licensure Program;
 - Admission Pathway for U.S.-Licensed Attorneys (conditioned on legislative amendments);
 - Special admission for U.S.-Licensed Attorneys; and
 - Extending the scaled score adjustment for participation in the November 2024 bar study to be applied to the multiple-choice portion of the General Bar Examination on whichever of the 2025 or 2026 administrations of the exam an applicant attempts first.
- Any recommendations made by CBE on May 30 that may require Supreme Court approval addressed in separate petition



July 2025 Update



July 2025 Applications



8,837

Bar Exam Applications



June 2

Final Filing Deadline



900

Approximate # of TA Applications



June 2

Final Filing Deadline



Proctor Recruitment



1300–1400

Number of Proctors Needed



1270

Proctors in Pipeline



345

Proctors from New Sources



52

Proctors Fully Onboarded and Ready for
Assignment



July 2025 Test Center Sites

Region	Standard Test Sites	Test Sites for Applicants with Certain Accommodations
Sacramento	@the Grounds	
		Hilton Sacramento Arden West
San Francisco	Oakland Convention Center	Oakland Convention Center
		Golden Gate University
Los Angeles	Anaheim Convention Center	
		Hotel Fera Anaheim, Orange
	Ontario Convention Center	Ontario Convention Center
	Pasadena Convention Center	Pasadena Convention Center
		CA State Bar Office in Los Angeles
San Diego	Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center	
		Sheraton Mission Valley San Diego Hotel

- LA State Bar Office (@160 test takers) – reduced distraction, semi-private rooms, private rooms



Planning Ahead



A Path Forward

- Planning for 2026 and beyond must begin now
- What will we plan for?
- What is the role of the Board and the CBE?
- How best to initiate the conversation?



Conversation Considerations

- **Transition to California developed MCQs**
 - Immediate term, designed to enable remote/test-center based testing
 - Preferred by test takers
 - Cost efficient as compared to in-person modality
 - Originally expected to save up to \$4 million annually due to transition to remote testing
 - Actual cost savings in part because of need for significant in-person testing options
- **Supreme Court ordered development of new bar exam**
 - October 2024
 - Pursuant to recommendations of Blue Ribbon Commission
 - Five-year development cycle (2031)



Conversation Considerations

- **Basis for Blue Ribbon Commission recommendation**
 - California-developed exam would:
 - Allow for CA-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to be tested
 - As outlined in 2017 California Attorney Practice Analysis
 - Administrative Law and Procedure and Employment Law
 - Unique emphasis in CA and recommended for inclusion in new bar exam
 - Reflective of increased emphasis on skills and reduced on memorization
 - Allow for innovation in exam delivery and frequency
 - Decoupling from NCBE allows for full control
 - Exam delivery and frequency tied to concerns about fairness, equity, and accessibility



Conversation Considerations

- **February 2025 remote/test-center administration failed**
 - Rollout of California MCQs in February 2025 was poorly executed and lacked transparency, impacting trust and credibility
- **Committee of Bar Examiners sets policy regarding exam administration and development, where appropriate subject to Supreme Court approval**
 - June CBE agenda includes planned discussion of BRC recommendations
- **Board of Trustees role has primarily been limited to contract approval and financial/budget oversight and approval**
 - Exceptions: Blue Ribbon Commission, Provisional Licensure, statutorily required Board review of exam every 7 years to determine if properly tests for minimal competence



Conversation Considerations

» Admissions fees raised effective 2024 and 2025

» Fees have increased between 23% to 58%

Admissions Fee Increases

Fee Type	Current	Prior	% Increase
General Applicant	\$850	\$677	26%
Attorney Applicant	\$1500	\$983	53%
General Moral Character	\$745	\$551	35%
Attorney Moral Character	\$873	\$551	58%

Conversation Considerations



Budgeted surpluses in 2025 and 2026 now reversed



Revised 2025 budget includes all known revenue projections and expenses



2026 Budget reflects in-person administration and both Kaplan and NCBE costs **and includes 2 additional FTE needed to support in-person administration (procurement + recruitment)**

Admissions Fund Budget

	2025 Adopted Budget	2025 Revised Budget	2026 Adopted Forecast	2026 Revised Forecast
Total Revenues	\$31,447,000	\$28,145,000	\$32,381,000	\$28,970,000
Expenses				
Personnel Costs	10,599,000	10,957,000	10,621,000	11,222,000
Exam Related	4,984,000	7,077,000	5,100,000	8,512,000
Indirect Costs	7,976,000	7,976,000	8,255,000	8,255,000
Other Expenses	5,281,000	5,647,000	5,205,000	5,231,000
Total Expenses	\$28,840,000	\$31,657,000	\$29,181,000	\$33,220,000
Reserve	\$9,535,785	\$3,408,903	\$13,188,785	(\$388,000)
Reserve Level	33.1%	10.8%	45.2%	-1.1%
Minimum Reserve			17%	

Decision Variables and Costs

In-Person vs Remote

Annual Estimated
Differential: \$2.8M

Facilities costs
increase annually

Proctor rates likely to
increase

Additional State Bar
staffing needed to
permanently support
in-person

State Bar Developed Only Exam

Annual cost of Kaplan
Contract:

2026 \$1.8M

2027 \$1.7M

2028 \$1.5M

2029 \$1.4M

Contract can be
cancelled after 2027
payment for \$0.7M
penalty

MBE

\$72/test taker

Costs are additional
through term of
Kaplan contract

NextGen

Notice the Decision:
February 2026

To trigger 2-year
notice requirement

Cost unknown



Decision-Making Principles

- Core values should drive decision-making
 - Access?
 - Affordability?
 - Reliability?
 - Fairness?
 - ✓ Metrics tied to these values used to evaluate options
- Blue Ribbon Commission's guiding principles as a source
 - *An exam that is fair, equitable, and minimizes disparate performance based on race, gender, ethnicity, disability, and other immutable characteristics*
 - *Fairness and equity include but are not limited to cost and the mode and method of how the exam is delivered or made available.*

