



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION**

TONY THURMOND
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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March 22, 2021

Dear High School District and Unified School District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

PROCEDURES FOR AWARDING THE GOLDEN STATE SEAL MERIT DIPLOMA

The Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GSSMD), established in 1997, provides recognition to public school graduates who have demonstrated mastery of the high school curriculum in various subject areas. The GSSMD is awarded jointly by the California State Board of Education (SBE) and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. GSSMD eligibility requirements currently include a combination of course grades, results from assessments produced by private providers or local educational agencies (LEAs), and/or qualifying California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics and California Science Test scores.

Per California *Education Code* sections 51450–55, each LEA that confers high school diplomas is required to maintain appropriate records in order to annually identify graduating seniors who have earned a GSSMD and to affix the GSSMD insignia to the diploma and transcript of each qualifying student.

Eligibility Requirements

At its March 2020 meeting, the SBE approved the current GSSMD requirements. To receive the GSSMD, students must be eligible to receive a high school diploma and must have demonstrated mastery of the curriculum in at least six subject areas. The six areas are ELA, mathematics, science, U.S. history, and two subject areas selected by the student.

The approved GSSMD eligibility requirements for the Class of 2020 are as follows:

1. ELA—students must have earned one of the following:
 - a. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment taken in grade eleven
 - b. A grade of B+ (or numeric equivalent) or above in a single ELA course (each semester) completed in grade nine, ten, or eleven

2. Mathematics—students must have earned one of the following:

- a. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment taken in grade eleven
 - b. A grade of B+ (or numeric equivalent) or above in a single mathematics course (each semester) completed in grade nine, ten, or eleven
3. Science—students must have earned one of the following:
- a. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school California Science Test taken in grade ten or eleven
 - b. A grade of B+ (or numeric equivalent) or above in a science course completed in grade nine, ten, or eleven
4. US history—students must have earned one of the following:
- a. A grade of B (or numerical equivalent) or above upon completion of the required US history course (each semester)
 - b. A qualifying score that demonstrates mastery of the subject as determined by the LEA for an examination produced by a private provider or LEA
5. Two additional subject areas—students may choose from any of the following:
- a. Any additional qualifying grade or score listed above, earned for the subject of ELA, mathematics, science, or U.S. history; and not already used to meet eligibility
 - b. A grade of B (or numerical equivalent) or above upon completion of high school courses in other subjects
 - c. A qualifying score that demonstrates mastery of other high school subjects, as determined by the LEA, for an examination produced by a private provider or LEA

Identifying Students Who Have Earned a GSSMD

The California Department of Education (CDE) provides the following materials online to assist LEAs in identifying graduating seniors who qualify for the GSSMD:

- **GSSMD Frequently Asked Questions [web page](#).** This Web page highlights the frequently asked questions from the field about the GSSMD, including why both black-and-white and gold seals are sent out, what time period constitutes a “course,” and whether honors classes are calculated differently from others.
- **Certification of Award Summary Sheet.** This is a spreadsheet that can be used to identify graduating seniors whose test scores meet the GSSMD requirements. It is **optional** and for LEA use only; for student confidentiality reasons, ***please do not submit it to the CDE.***
- **GSSMD Request Form.** Complete this form and send it electronically to gssmd@cde.ca.gov to request the seals for eligible students.
- These materials as well as additional information are available on the [CDE GSSMD Web page](#).

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These materials as well as additional information are available on the [CDE GSSMD Web page](#).

Please share this information with your high school principals, administrators, counselors, credit clerks, and staff in district curriculum offices. After identifying students who qualify for the GSSMD prepare one Golden State Seal Request Form for your LEA or charter school. The form must be signed by the district superintendent or charter school administrator. The completed and signed form can be emailed to the CDE at gssmd@cde.ca.gov. Please note that the CDE will begin mailing requested seals the first week of April.

Although there is no deadline for submitting the form, LEAs should send their requests far enough in advance of the date of the first graduation ceremony in the district to allow sufficient time for the CDE to process the request and for school staff to affix the seals to the diplomas and transcripts. Generally, the seals can be expected within two weeks of the date the CDE receives a request.

Sincerely,

/s/

Mao J. Vang, Ed.D.

Director

Assessment Development and Administration Division

MV:cm

cc: LEA CAASPP Coordinators