



January 23, 2023

Dear County and District Superintendents, Charter School Administrators, and High School Principals:

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 and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. GSSMD eligibility requirements 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 State Board of Education 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 and thereafter are as follows:

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

2. Mathematics—students must have earned one of the following:
 - a. A grade of B+ or above (or numerical equivalent) in a single course (each semester) that the student completed in grade nine, ten, or eleven
 - b. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment
3. Science—students must have earned one of the following:
 - a. A grade of B+ or above (or numerical equivalent) in a single course (each semester) that the student completed in grade nine, ten, or eleven
 - b. An achievement level of "Standard Met" or above for the high school California Science Test taken in grade ten or eleven
4. U.S. history—students must have earned one of the following:
 - a. A grade of B or above (or numerical equivalent) upon completion of each semester of the required U.S. history course
 - 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 other 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 above (or numerical equivalent) 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 the LEA

Identifying Students Who Have Earned a GSSMD

The following materials are among those provided on the California Department of Education (CDE) GSSMD web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tq/ca/meritdiploma.asp> to assist LEAs in identifying graduating seniors who qualify for the GSSMD:

- **GSSMD Frequently Asked Questions** web page, which 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**, a spreadsheet that can be used to identify graduating seniors whose test scores meet the GSSMD requirements. This is an optional tool that is for LEA use only. For student confidentiality reasons, **do not submit this spreadsheet to the CDE.**
- **GSSMD Request Form**, which is signed by the district superintendent or charter school administrator and then sent electronically to gssmd@cde.ca.gov to request the seals for eligible students.

The CDE will begin mailing requested seals in February. 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.

Please share this information with your administrators, counselors, credit clerks, and staff in district curriculum offices. Any questions about the GSSMD should be directed to gssmd@cde.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Signed by

Mao J. Vang, EdD, Director
Assessment Development and Administration Division

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cc: LEA California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Coordinators