



December 11, 2025

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

## **Procedures for Awarding the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma**

The Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GSSMD), established in 1996, 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 qualifying California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics and California Science Test scores.

Per California *Education Code* sections 51450–51455, 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 an insignia onto the diploma and transcript of each qualifying student.

### **New Procedure This Year—Digital Insignia Image**

Starting in 2025–26, the California Department of Education (CDE) will no longer mail physical copies of the gold insignias or the black and white insignias to LEAs. Instead, the CDE will transition to a single digital image of the insignia to be used on both the diploma and transcript. Once LEAs complete and submit a request form, the insignia image will be emailed directly to the requestor. LEAs should determine how the insignia will be applied onto the diploma and transcript well in advance of the end of the school year.

Depending upon an LEA's unique factors, one of the following options may be preferable over another:

- LEAs can electronically embed the Golden State Seal directly onto the diploma or transcript prior to printing.
- LEAs can choose to print the insignias themselves and affix them directly onto the diploma and transcript.

## **Eligibility 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 subjects selected by the student. The State Board of Education approved the GSSMD eligibility requirements for the Class of 2020 and thereafter, as follows:

1. ELA/literacy—students must have earned one of any of the following:
  - a. A grade of B+ or above (or numerical equivalent) each semester of a single course completed in grades nine, ten, or eleven
  - b. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment taken in grade eleven
2. Mathematics—students must have earned one of the following:
  - a. A grade of B+ or above (or numerical equivalent) each semester of a single course completed in grades nine, ten, or eleven
  - b. An achievement level of “Standard Met” or above for the high school Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment taken in grade eleven
3. Science—students must have earned one of the following:
  - a. A grade of B+ or above (or numerical equivalent) each semester of a single course that the student completed in grades 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) on 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) on completion of high school courses in other subjects

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- c. A qualifying score that demonstrates mastery of other high school subjects, determined by the LEA, for an examination produced by a private provider or LEA

### Identifying Students Who Have Earned a Golden State Seal Merit Diploma

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

- **The Certification of Award Summary Sheet**, a spreadsheet that can be used to identify graduating seniors who 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.**
- **The GSSMD Request Form**, which is signed by the district superintendent or charter school administrator and then sent electronically to [GSSMD@cde.ca.gov](mailto:GSSMD@cde.ca.gov) to request the insignia for eligible students.
- **Frequently Asked Questions**, which highlight questions from the field about the GSSMD, such as what period constitutes a course and whether honors classes are calculated differently from others.

Insignias will be emailed once the CDE receives a request. Although there is no deadline for submitting the form, LEAs should develop a plan to ensure sufficient time for school staff to affix or print the seals on student diplomas and transcripts.

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](mailto:GSSMD@cde.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Signed by*

Mary Nicely, Deputy Superintendent  
Information and Technology Branch

MN:sf

cc: Local Educational Agency California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Coordinators