



# The State Bar of California

## Remote Administration of the Bar Examination

For the first-ever remote administration of the California Bar Exam, held in October 2020, the State Bar partnered with the National Conference of Bar Examiners to survey examinees about their experience.

The survey was designed to elicit information about the impact of specific components of the remote exam—technology, location, the utility of a “mock” exam, and responsiveness of help desk support—so that the State Bar can improve online testing if the Supreme Court orders future online exams. Just under 10,000 test takers were sent the survey, and more than half (5,305) responded.

It should be noted at the outset that the extraordinary circumstances under which the online exam was developed and administered—the pressure of a pandemic and a short timeline for implementation of the exam—were reflected in a number of the survey results. One example of the stress that the current circumstances created for examinees: almost six out of 10 respondents (59 percent) expressed moderate or extreme concern over having to take an exam *in any manner* during the pandemic.

### **Additional findings that pointed to the challenges of remote administration of the exam included:**

- Just over half of respondents (51 percent) indicated that the materials provided by the State Bar were timely and thorough.
- And only slightly more (57 percent) agreed that the materials were understandable.

This information will direct the State Bar’s attention to improving both the content and the timeliness of materials provided to exam takers.

### **Looking at the testing environment:**

- Almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) took the exam at home; another 5 percent took the exam at their office, and 3 percent took it at their law school. Twelve percent took the exam in a hotel room.
- More than half of respondents (58 percent) reported that the testing environment inhibited them from demonstrating their competence.
- Despite that, when asked how they would prefer to take the bar exam if they had to sit for it again, 88 percent indicated that they would prefer to take it remotely: two-thirds (63 percent) reported preferring to take it online in an isolated environment (like at home or in a hotel), and another 25 percent reported preferring to take it online in a group setting (such as a school or test center). Only 6 percent reported a preference for taking the exam in some other fashion, other than on a computer.
- Over half of respondents (57 percent) reported that they were satisfied with remote testing (including both very satisfied and extremely satisfied responses), while 28 percent reported some level of dissatisfaction (including both dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied responses).

### **Looking at the technology and preparation for the exam:**

- Just under three-quarters of respondents (72 percent) reported that accessing the passwords for each question was seamless.

- A similar proportion of respondents (71 percent) reported that the mandatory mock exams helped them become familiar with the features and functionality of the remote bar exam format.
- However, about one in five respondents (22 percent) reported having technical issues with the mock exam. And of those, more than half (54 percent) reported that it took them more than 45 minutes to resolve technical issues during the mock exams.
- Addressing the challenges that exam-takers experienced with the mock exam may have helped resolve issues in advance of exam day, as the number of people reporting issues on exam day declined to 15 percent of respondents.

Data reported directly by ExamSoft suggests that the number of serious problems may have been still smaller. ExamSoft's figures indicate that the company was contacted by just over 8 percent of exam-takers. These data have the benefit of representing objective measures of call volume and issue resolution. Unlike the survey results, which may reflect some bias based on exam takers' self-selection, ExamSoft data represent the entire universe of help desk calls.

The State Bar will be examining more closely the data from the survey and ExamSoft to better understand the remote exam experience and improve it for future exams.

#### **By the Numbers**

- 10,355 – applicants were approved to sit for the exam
- 1,739 – applicants withdrew for a full refund up through and including the cut-off date of September 8
- 2,704 – applicants were withdrawn, either for not returning the required testing conditions document or for not taking and uploading the required mock exams, of which:
  - 2,029 withdrawn by the applicant
  - 675 withdrawn by administration
- 9,623 – applicants registered to take the remote online exam and completed the mandatory mock exams
- 306 – applicants completed the mandatory mock exam and subsequently withdrew or failed to download the exam questions
- 9,317 – applicants expected to “show” on exam day for the remote exam (does not include the “handwriters” or the approximately 150 applicants testing onsite with a Testing Accommodation)

#### **Focusing on the 9,317 who were set to take the exam remotely, online:**

- 97.3 percent of all exam files were uploaded, with the breakdown by question is as follows:
  - Essay question 1: 97.4 percent
  - Essay question 2: 97.2 percent
  - Essay question 3: 97.1 percent
  - Essay question 4: 97 percent
  - Essay question 5: 97 percent
  - MBE (multiple choice): 97.2 percent
  - Performance Test: 96.8 percent