

Social Work Licensure Compact Commission
Rules Document

Title of Rule: Rule on Qualifying National Exam

Vote on Rule: This rule will be discussed and voted on at the Social Work Licensure Compact Commission meeting on _____.

Public comment: Interested persons may electronically submit written comments on the proposed rule to socialworkcompact@csg.org with the subject line “Social Work Licensure Compact Rule Comment” or by registering to attending the meeting at which the rule will be discussed and voted on. Register to speak here. Written comments on the proposed rule must be submitted 48 hours before the meeting.

Effective: Upon passage

Reason for Rule: To further define Qualifying National Exam pursuant to Section 2 and Section 4 of the Social Work Licensure Compact.

History for Rule: February 4, 2025: Rule Proposed at Social Work Compact Commission Meeting

Chapter 2: Rule on Qualifying National Exam

Authority: Section 2: Definitions
Section 4: Social Worker Participation in the Compact
Section 12: Rulemaking

1.0 Purpose:

Pursuant to Section 12, the Social Work Licensure Compact Commission shall promulgate reasonable and lawful uniform rules to facilitate and coordinate implementation and administration of the Social Work Licensure Compact. This rule will become effective upon passage by the Social Work Licensure Commission as provided in Section 12.

1.1 Qualifying National Exam:

A. As set forth in Section 4.B.(1)(a), a clinical-category Qualifying National Exam means the Clinical Examination administered by the Association of Social Work Boards.

B. As set forth in Section 4.C(1)(a), a master's-category Qualifying National Exam means either: (i) the Masters Examination or (ii) the Advanced Generalist Examination, administered by the Association of Social Work Boards.

C. As set forth in Section 4.D(1)(a), a bachelor's-category Qualifying National Exam means the Bachelors Examination administered by the Association of Social Work Boards.

DRAFT

1. Does the compact commission require that the Qualifying National Examination scores remain consistent over time?

Unlike all other examination developers I have studied (like the NCLEX examinations for nursing), ASWB continually monitors scored exam items for biased functioning. So even after they move out of the 20 items in the pretesting stage and onto the 150 scored items summed into the person's test score, ASWB performs differential item functioning and removes test items flagged for biased performance.

If ASWB removed a scored item for biased functioning in 2024, all examinations that used the question in 2023, 2022, and before would need to reduce their cut score for passing since it was calculated using an item that ASWB knows is no longer valid and fair. They talk about this the exam guidebook and many public statements, some quotes:

On page 23 in [ASWB's \(2023\) examination guidebook](#):

"All ASWB examination questions are monitored to ensure that there is nothing in the content that would provide an advantage to one demographic group over another. This evaluation occurs during the pretest phase—before questions are included in the scored question bank—and **continues while they are used as scored questions**" (ASWB, 2023, p. 21).

In a [2020 article in Social Work Today](#), ASWB Examination Director Lavina Harless confirmed:

"Monitoring of item performance doesn't end once an item moves out of pretest status. **Scored items are continually monitored** to ensure that performance doesn't slip. **If a scored item demonstrates a statistically significant drop** in performance, it is **taken out of use and returned to the examination committee for review**. Should the committee decide to edit and keep the item, it returns to pretest status" (para. 12).

In a [2021 issue of the New Social Worker](#), Stacey Owens, ASWB Item Development Consultant gave rough statistics:

The first tool ASWB uses is a testing industry statistical measurement called Differential Item Functioning (DIF). DIF indicates whether an exam question shows tendencies to advantage or disadvantage one group of test-takers over another (ASWB, 2020). DIF is identified by statistically analyzing responses to the exam questions—called items—during pretesting. **Scored items are continually monitored for DIF**. On an annual basis, less than 5% of all items released show DIF. Items flagged for DIF are removed from the bank of potential exam questions. (para. 3)

In ASWB's [2023 Testing Enhancements webinar](#), Examination Director Harless detailed:

"What if then people start to get it wrong? Again, because we do our research ahead of time, that doesn't typically happen. **If we see something that looks like maybe there's a**

shift in practice or something occurring, we'll pull those test questions down and take a look at those with our subject matter experts on our Examination Committee" (57:20)

Former CEO Dwight Hymans concurred with this policy in 2020 in an [NASW Facebook Live](#): **"when an item is live on an exam, we continue to look at [DIF] statistics** and if it begins to show bias in one direction or another **it's pulled from the exams** and goes right back through all the steps." (NASW, 2020, 35:00).

Continually monitoring for bias in scored exam items may seem like good policy, but it is not a best practice or testing standard. And you can see why because this component of ASWB exams brings with it an unavoidable ethical dilemma—with how best to inform stakeholders the passing score changed after removing an item for DIF— that makes ASWB exams a poor fit for a Qualifying National Examination.

If the compact commission would like to adopt an exam that uses ongoing DIF monitoring, they are ethically obligated to use the updated cut score and reach out proactively to ASWB about any scored items removed for bias. At present, ASWB does not provide this information to state boards or update the score reports of test-takers.

If the compact commission would like to have consistent score, it should not adopt the ASWB exams and should instead fund the creation of a national exam that uses the required statistical tests used to monitor exam equity without ethical dilemmas, including calculating the conditional standard of error, test information function, and decision-consistency.

2. What are the compact commission's requirements for equilibrating examination blueprints? How will we know that 2018 & 2026 exams are psychometrically equivalent?

In 2018, after new exams were introduced, the pass rate for all social workers reduced by about 10%. According to ASWB's 2022 report, the bachelors examination first-time pass rate for all social workers reduced from 77.5% in 2011 to 68.7% in 2021. A comparable decline was noted in masters exam first-time pass rates from 82.5% to 73.0% across the 11 years reported. Despite marketing all examinations as comparable across years, ASWB (2022b) directly attributes the 10-13% drop in exam pass rates "between 2017 and 2018...most likely occurred because of the introduction of a new exam blueprint" (p. 8).

ASWB hides data about blueprint equivalence. In its Exam Pass Rate Analysis, ASWB (2022b) did not report equity data prior to 2017 because "the introduction of a new exam blueprint can result in slight changes to exam content. Focusing on test-takers between 2018 and 2021 allows for more direct comparisons across similar testing experiences" (p. 3). This explanation is confounding, as scores on 2017 and 2018 examinations are required to be directly comparable in the policy context. Although all test scores declined, Asian, Black, Latine, Indigenous, and English-secondary test-takers never made it above the average...only White and multiracial test-takers perform above average.

Public questions for Interstate licensing compact discussion on Qualifying National Exams

We went from 80% pass rates in 2012 to 70% pass rates in 2018. We cannot afford to continue our way down to 60%. Social work examinations are consistently below our colleagues in counseling and marriage and family therapy.

In 2018, after new exams were introduced, the pass rate for *all social workers* reduced by about 10%. According to [ASWB's Exam Pass Rate Analysis](#):

Figure 15. 2011–2021 Bachelors exam first-time pass rates by year and eventual pass rate

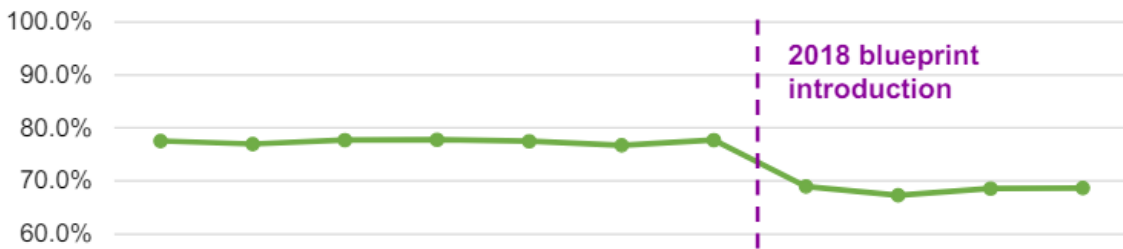
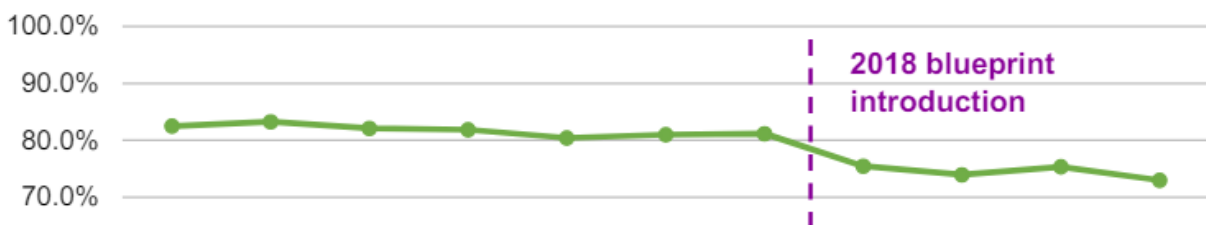
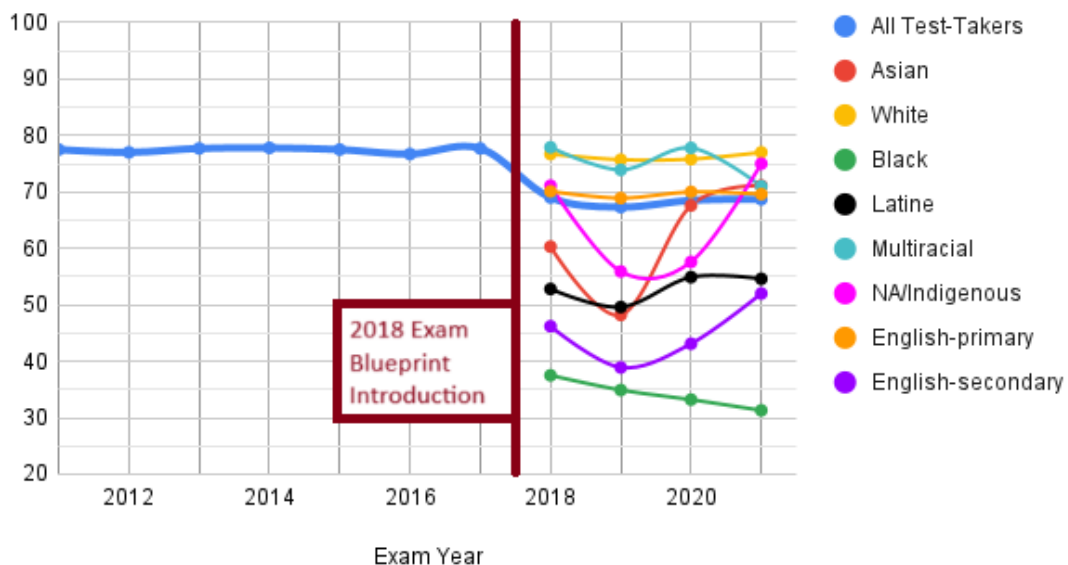


Figure 8. 2011–2021 Masters exam first-time pass rates by year and eventual pass rate



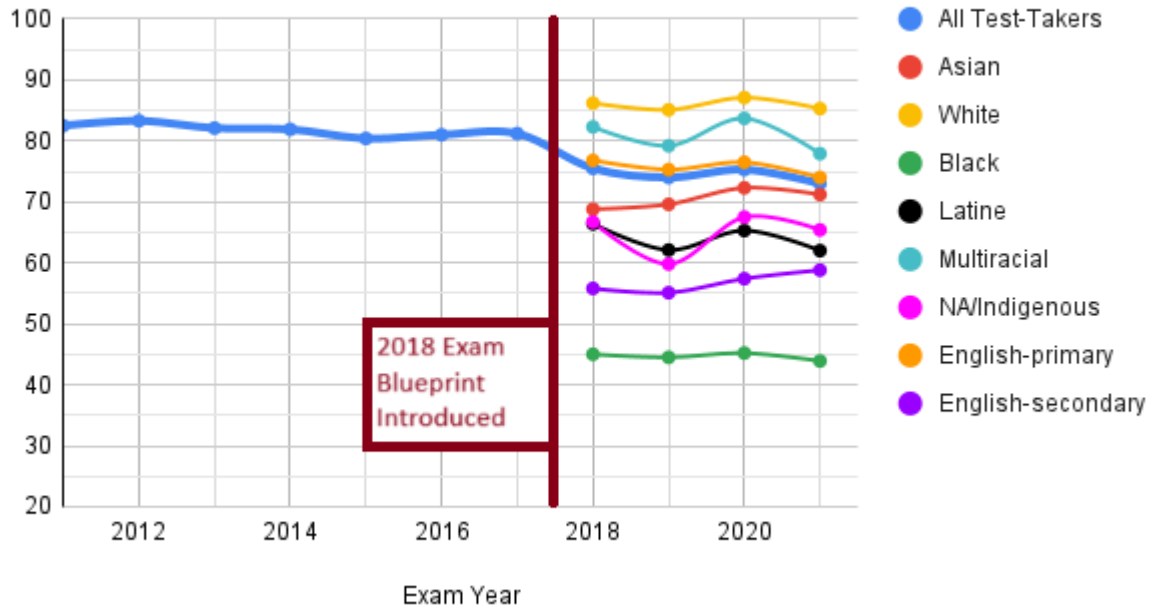
Here is a visual representation of the gap in exam scores reported by ASWB in their 2022 Exam Pass Rate Analysis by demographics. These indicate that white test-takers were least impacted by the 2018 exam blueprint and minoritized social workers were most impacted.

Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Bachelors Exam Pass Rates by Demographic



Public questions for Interstate licensing compact discussion on Qualifying National Exams

Impact of 2018 Blueprint on Masters Exam Pass Rates by Demographic



Likely, the 2018 examination blueprint made an already-inequitable exam less valid and fair.