

**Master of Arts in Educational Administration degree**  
**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION STUDY MANUAL**

**Fall 2024**

**Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies**  
**Michael D. Eisner College of Education**

**California State University, Northridge**

Congratulations!

If you are reading this manual (and accessed ELPS 697 course material on Canvas), you have nearly completed your coursework and are preparing to take the ELPS Comprehensive Examination. That is quite an accomplishment! Take a minute to pat yourself on the back and reflect on all that you have done and the things that you have sacrificed in order to get to this day. Although you have work ahead of you (namely, studying for the “Comps.”) you have done a lot of the work already. As a candidate for the Master of Arts in Educational Administration degree, you may be just a little concerned about taking the Comprehensive Exam. This is an exam that is supposed to determine if you have not only retained the information from each and every graduate class you have taken, but that you will be able to apply it during the exam and in real world situations.

Use this Study Manual in conjunction with the Comprehensive Exam Preparation Calendar and the materials/resources located on the ELPS 697 Canvas course site to prepare for the Comprehensive Exam. Your success this semester relies (somewhat heavily) on how you utilize this study manual and related Canvas course materials. Use it for your maximum benefit. Please read the entire Study Manual. Lots of continued success to you!

## OVERVIEW

The comprehensive examination is designed to facilitate student synthesis and application of information and skills learned and discussed in coursework throughout the program of study. The *three thematic essay format* encourages students to apply what they have learned in coursework to real-world situations. The exam section prompts focus student attention on pressing issues and practices in P-12 educational leadership/administration.

Students will be given access on Friday at noon on the assigned Comps. Exam extended weekend and you will submit your exam section responses in the ELPS 697 Canvas course site by 11:59 p.m. on the assigned Monday. The exam section prompts are written in such a way as to provide students several different options in which to focus your response.

Students are permitted the use of course and textbook materials in writing responses. However, you must not receive outside help from anyone during the exam—that is, this is an independently completed online exam process.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

As part of our commitment to fostering a dynamic learning environment the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies acknowledges the potential benefits and drawbacks of incorporating generative AI tools such as ChatGPT with course assignments. For the purpose of course assignments you can take advantage of generative AI to help brainstorm and fine tune your ideas; draft an outline to clarify your thoughts; or check grammar, rigor, or style. **You cannot use AI to generate any written material for course assignments. You cannot use AI to generate any written material for the Comprehensive Exam. All course assignments must adhere to [CSUN's academic dishonesty policy](#).**

## **FORMATTING**

Exam section responses must be prepared according to the APA style manual (7th edition), including title page, in-text citations, pagination, headings, and reference list. Papers should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. Title page and Reference page are included in the 5-page maximum of each exam section. Each exam section response should be clear, succinct, free of grammatical mistakes, free of jargon, free of deficit-based arguments, and free of gender-biased language. Please remember two important practices: proofread all written work and always cite your sources.

## **EXAM EVALUATION AND EVALUATION RUBRIC**

A grade of “Pass” or “Non-Pass” will be awarded for each of the three exam section essays of the Comprehensive Exam. If you receive a grade of “Pass” for all three exam sections you have officially passed the Comprehensive Exam. Your responses will be evaluated with a rubric located on the ELPS 697 Canvas course site.

## **PREPARATION AND TIPS FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

- **Get Organized!**

Go through all of your Canvas course resources, textbooks, your notes and handouts, and establish a “need-to- study” pile and a “do not need-to-study” pile.

- **Participate in our Reading/Writing Study Groups**

A group counters isolation; forces you to be more critical, and group discussions will help draw attention to primary issues, underlying factors and best practices that might have otherwise been missed. Start meeting on a weekly basis. Study/practice strategically and hold yourself accountable.

- **Writing**

Set aside time each week to write a sample essay as well as exchange sample essay responses with group members in order to help each other by providing peer review feedback. Teach each other, and work with a constructive and supportive peer environment as you prepare for the exam. Remember, you will be expected to communicate essential information with clarity, evidence-based claims, and free of grammatical mistakes

- **Participate**

In all Comprehensive Exam (Zoom) Seminars, and all Comprehensive Exam Preparation Calendar assignments and weekly asynchronous Canvas activities.

## **YOUR ATTITUDE AND MENTAL STATE ABOUT THE COMP. EXAM**

The context you create for studying and performing at the exam is critical: try to develop a positive attitude towards the exam prep period. Rather than thinking of the exam as a competition a “grill session,” consider the experience as an opportunity to indulge in your own intellectual development. Manage your stress since exams can be a nerve-wracking time. Eat well, sleep, get exercise, do what it takes to allow your brain to work at its best

### **PARTICIPATE:**

#### **In all Comprehensive Exam (Zoom) Seminars**

There are scheduled online live Zoom sessions where ELPS 697 instructor(s) discuss exam details, guide response outlines and formatting, facilitate review of course material, and answer questions about the Comprehensive Examination. The Comp. Exam Zoom seminars provide important information in advance about the exam. It is important that you attend and participate. Additionally, your instructor expects you to interact with the weekly asynchronous preparation and practice activities (see Comprehensive Exam Preparation Calendar) housed on the ELPS 697 Canvas course site.

## **OVERVIEW AND EXAM SECTION DETAILS**

You will submit a 5-page maximum response for each Exam section. This includes Title page and Reference page (to be included if you cite a text or course reading within the body of your response essay). The Comp. Exam is an online examination (i.e., take-home, open book) and independently completed. The directions and submission of the Comprehensive exam will be located on the ELPS 697 Canvas course site and discussed during Comps Zoom Seminars.

You will choose either Prompt A or Prompt B for each of the following exam sections:

- Exam Section #1: Supervision of Curriculum and Instruction
- Exam Section #2: Organization/Administration of Elementary, Secondary, and Special Education
- Exam Section #3: General Administration

## **Knowledge of Problem/Topic**

You should demonstrate knowledge of the PK-12 topic/problem as it relates to administrative educational leadership and best practices.

Your Comprehensive exam section responses should be based on assigned course readings, CalAPA, class activities, and/or group research on course-related papers, projects, or presentations. The essay prompts are written in such a way as to provide you several different options in which to focus your response. Are there primary factors and underlying issues that need to be addressed? What do we know about these issues (from course content, literature)? How would you, as an administrator respond?

## **Relevant Coursework**

You can use concepts/examples from the following ELPS MA PK12 program courses:

- ELPS 600 Research in Educational Leadership
- ELPS 650 Contemporary Administrative Leadership
- ELPS 663 Legal Aspects of Educational Administration
- ELPS 664 Business and Financial Aspects of Educational Administration
- ELPS 672 Management of Human Resources
- ELPS 676 School Community Relations
- ELPS 681 Organization and Administration of Elementary, Secondary, and Special Education
- ELPS 682 Supervision of Curriculum and Instruction

## **Final Course Grade**

At the end of the semester, you will not receive a grade for the ELPS 697 course. This course is graded as Credit (passed all three parts of the Comp exam) or No Credit (did not pass all three parts of the Comp exam).

## **Passing the Comprehensive Exam**

A student must achieve a score of “Pass” on all three exam sections to successfully receive a passing score on the Comprehensive Exam.

If you receive notice of Non-Pass in one or more exam sections, you will be provided an opportunity to take the exam a second time as a retake. The University only allows a student to retake the exam one time, and the student must be enrolled that semester.

Additionally, these students will be invited to attend an individual instructor-student meeting to discuss their preparation for the resubmit response and review of their initial response.

**The following pages include practice prompts. They are designed to facilitate the work of students preparing for the Comprehensive exam. They may or may not be similar to those appearing on the actual Comp. Exam.**

**EXAM SECTION #1: SUPERVISION OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

1. A major question in curriculum is: "Who determines what we teach in the schools?" Identify and discuss what persons or groups determine the curriculum content in the schools today and from whom do they derive their authority?
2. Outline the procedures you would follow in conducting an action research program to improve student learning in school: (a) list the specific steps to be accomplished and (b) briefly explain its implementation.
3. The increase in required courses mandated by changes in the state law and college entrance requirements have seriously decreased the opportunity for students to enroll in elective courses. Cite several arguments for and several arguments against the increase in required courses.
4. Name and discuss three forces/agencies, external to the local schools, that are currently contributing to the initiation of curriculum change in California.
5. Discuss the role of the building principal in bringing about curriculum improvement.
6. What do you consider the three most critical curriculum issues facing educational leaders today? Discuss your number one issue and indicate how you believe the schools should respond to it.
7. Discuss the arguments for and against national/federal standards.
8. A small group of parents and citizens has attacked two textbooks being used in a science course. Discuss the steps you would take to respond to this attack.
9. Evaluation and self-evaluation are playing a major part in the improvement of the instructional program in the modern-day school. Describe the techniques the supervisor might employ in evaluating the following: (a) himself/herself; (b) the supervisors role; and (c) the school program.
10. Outline a procedure to be followed by a school supervisor in (a) planning a classroom visitation with a teacher; (b) making the visit; and (c) the conference, which follows the visitation.
11. You have been asked to be in charge of the professional development program for a school district. What are some key elements you would consider in planning for the year ahead?
12. List several rather specific practices or activities of classroom teachers that tend to contribute to their teaching effectiveness. Discuss in detail any two of these practices and explain why they are so effective.

13. Indicate three reasons teachers fail to achieve maximum effectiveness in the classroom and the actions a supervisor may take to help teachers increase effectiveness in these areas.
14. One of the major roles of a principal is “instructional leadership.” Describe three (3) important aspects of this leadership.
15. Discuss in detail two specific practices or activities of classroom teachers that contribute significantly to their teaching effectiveness and explain why they are so effective.
16. As a school principal you want to establish a peer coaching program at your school. Describe what the program might involve and how you would implement it.
17. What are the California Standards for the Teaching Profession and how might a principal use them to improve instruction among teachers?
18. Developmental Supervision of teachers calls for the use of different supervisory approaches by the supervisor. Describe three different approaches that might be used and the rationale for each.

**EXAM SECTION #2: ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF  
ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

1. Discuss briefly what you would consider to be the five most critical “areas of competence” needed by today’s school principal and explain the reasons why each are important.
2. You recently have been appointed principal in a new district. Describe the steps you would take to establish a school climate that encourages change and innovation on the part of the faculty and explain why each step is important.
3. For many years many educators have advocated the elimination of small school districts and amalgamation, unification, etc. to form increasingly larger administrative units. More recently the trend appears to have reversed, with the talk now largely in terms of decentralization. Discuss the factors which tend to operate in favor of large districts and those which appear to make decentralization desirable.
4. What are steps necessary to establish a full inclusion program for special needs students in your school?
5. Discuss several major issues that should be considered in determining whether or not to move from a *(K-6)-(7-9)-(10-12)*-school configuration to a *(K-5)-(6-8)-(9-12)* organizational plan.
6. The percentage of students at a given age level who continue in school to high school graduation rose very markedly from the early part of the century (20th) for a considerable period of time. More recently it has declined quite substantially. Cite and discuss what you believe to be the three most compelling reasons for this decline and some means that a district might employ to reverse the trend in each of the three areas.
7. The board has requested that several of the school principals in the district prepare position papers dealing with the duties and responsibilities of a principal. You have been given the topic, “The Role of the Principal in Enhancing the Instructional Process.” Prepare a paper responding to this topic.
8. One of the signs of a good leader is their willingness to delegate administrative authority and responsibility. Describe four criteria that you, as a school principal, would employ in determining what should and what should not be delegated.
9. Describe how you, as a principal, would promote maximum participation of the school staff in the decision-making process within your school.
10. Articulation between the elementary and junior high school is of great concern to parents, students, both staffs and the board. Since both you and the junior high principal are new to the district, the superintendent feels that now would be a good time for a change. He has requested that both principals individually submit a plan for articulation and then later both will meet to form and agree on the plan to be implemented. Prepare your plan.

11. IDEIA continues to have a tremendous impact on public education. Discuss four of the major features of this bill.
12. Assume that you have been recently appointed principal of a new school. Describe how you would proceed in establishing an effective school-community relations program in your school.
13. One of the recognized responsibilities of a school principal is that of providing an orientation program for new teachers to his/her school. Discuss what components go into the development of a quality orientation program.
14. Much has been written about mission statements of organizations, and you have learned the importance of a "shared vision" for your school. As the new principal of your school, present how you would develop such a statement and what you would need to do to ensure that it relates to the shared vision.
15. In current contract negotiations, the Teachers' union has expressed its desire that teachers have a greater role in the decision making at their individual schools. The school board is split on this issue and has requested input from the principals in the district. As a principal, describe four guidelines that you feel should be included in any policy that the board might submit for negotiation.
16. You have been appointed principal of a new school in the district. At least half of the staff will be new to the district. Describe what steps you would take to ensure a climate that would permit and encourage innovation on the part of the staff as individuals and as a staff.
17. The editor of the local paper has called and requested that you prepare an article on the Role and Purpose of Alternative Schools at the Secondary Level. Prepare such an article.
18. The high school of which you are principal will soon be visited by an accrediting team of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The local newspaper editor has called and indicated that she feels that the community knows very little about this undertaking and has requested that you prepare an article for publication, which would explain the purposes and procedures of the accreditation. Prepare such an article.

**EXAM SECTION #3: GENERAL ADMINISTRATION**

1. A supervisor can facilitate effective communication. Discuss three (3) of the skills necessary to facilitate effective communication.
2. Katz, and several other writers in the field, have suggested that the school administrator should possess considerable skills in each of three general categories--human skills, technical skills, and conceptual skills. For each of these categories, briefly discuss three tasks of the principal that demand expertise in the specific skill (i.e., three human, three technical, and three conceptual).
3. List and describe three sources of conflict in an organization and tell what the supervisor can do to reduce each.
4. Administrators are continuously faced with the task of making decisions with regard to issues, personnel problems, operational procedures, etc. Discuss the dynamics of the decision-making process.
5. Alternative schools are developing in many districts across the country. Give a definition of alternative school tell why they have come into existence, how they are evaluated and speculate upon their future development either within or outside of the prevailing school system.
6. It is a commonly expressed opinion that the "image" of the public school has become "tarnished" in recent years. (a) List what you consider to be the three greatest causes of this decline in public esteem, and (b) briefly discuss what you, as a principal, would propose to reverse this trend and enhance the prestige of your community's schools.
7. Identify and discuss in some detail six principles of an effective school community relations program.
8. List and discuss (a) what you consider to be the three most cogent arguments in favor of district-wide testing for "minimum competencies and (b) why it's important.
9. Briefly discuss several of the most prominent arguments advanced (a) in support of collective bargaining for public employees and (b) in opposition to such bargaining.
10. Arguments are frequently advanced that teacher tenure should be abolished now that teachers are protected by strong unions and collective bargaining agreements. Choose one side of this issue and draft a statement supporting your point of view.
11. The current public clamor for "higher standards" has led numerous boards of education to consider mandating a "C" average for graduation from high school. The superintendent has asked his principals to provide a report with the "pros" and "cons" of such a move. Discuss the points you will present to the superintendent.
12. A recent change in many school programs involve the use of a number of instructional aides and other non-certificated personnel working with students. Discuss several concerns a principal might have regarding the use of aides and steps that could be taken to alleviate these concerns.

13. With the shortage of funds, some districts have started educational foundations where citizens of the community can donate tax-exempt gifts to the schools. State the arguments for or against such a foundation being started in the school district where you are the principal.
14. School-based Management has been implemented by some major school districts. Provide the possible pros and cons of school-based management.
15. Recently there have been indications of gang activity developing in your previously gang-free district. Fights, graffiti, gang symbols, etc. have been noted by staff and the police. Discuss what steps you, as the principal, might take to address this problem.
16. As a site administrator you are asked by the superintendent to present the advantages and disadvantages of the School of Choice Proposal at a future Board of Education meeting. Provide the process you would follow to prepare, and the report as requested by the superintendent.
17. The Board of Education has asked that the district revise and update the Student Discipline Policy. Discuss steps you, as the staff person in charge of this rewriting project, would take in the completion of this change.
18. Vandalism has become a significant problem in the district with several instances of damaged classrooms and significant financial losses sustained. Indicate some steps you, as the principal of the district, might take in response to this problem.

Ellen K. Edeburn, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor & Graduate Coordinator  
[ellen.edeburn@csun.edu](mailto:ellen.edeburn@csun.edu)

Mariel Noyes  
Administrative Support Coordinator  
[mariel.noyes@csun.edu](mailto:mariel.noyes@csun.edu)

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