

A 3D perspective view of a grid of dark gray cubes. The cubes are arranged in a grid that recedes into the distance. One cube, located in the lower right area of the grid, is a vibrant red color, standing out from the others. The lighting creates soft shadows on the white background.

***The aswb social
work licensing
examinations:***

fact and fiction

Donna DeAngelis, LICSW, ACSW
Executive Director, ASWB

Who we are



Association of Social Work Boards

Regulatory boards – 49 states, DC, USVI, all
Canadian provinces

*Board action databank, CE provider
approval, model law, communication,
education, and...*

The ASWB Social Work Licensing Examinations



- Over 32,000 exams in 2011
- Computer delivered exams
- Over 220 Pearson VUE testing sites in North America
- 52 weeks a year
- North American scope
- Four-option multiple choice
- 170 items (questions) – 150 scored; 20 pretest
- Items are randomly administered to candidates
- 4 hour limit
- Multiple forms on-line
- Set passing score

The ASWB Social Work Licensing Examinations



Exam Categories

Associate – non social work-degreed applicants for paraprofessional social work licenses (only a few jurisdictions)

Bachelors – appropriate for BSWs with 0-2 years of experience

Masters – appropriate for MSWs with 0-2 years of experience

Advanced Generalist– appropriate for MSWs with 2-5 years of experience in non-clinical settings

Clinical – appropriate for MSWs with 2-5 years of experience in clinical settings

Why this presentation?

The licensing exams can prevent someone from pursuing their chosen career.

Not everyone passes them.

Naturally, opinions abound.

Facts are also involved.



“To be positive: to be mistaken at the top of one's voice.”

-Ambrose Bierce



Today

- ***The purpose of licensure tests***
- ***How the tests are built***
- ***What the tests measure***
- ***How the tests measure it***
- ***What the results mean – and what they don't***
- ***The ASWB exams and the social work community***

The purpose of licensure testing

To make money

To protect turf

FICTION

To guarantee excellence

To restrict trade

The purpose of licensure testing ***reality***

Objective way of establishing ***MINIMAL COMPETENCE*** to practice safely

Focused on the line between those with and without this minimal competence; does not determine excellence

Focused on knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to ***protection of the public***

One of ***several components*** in a licensure decision

How the tests are built

A committee
chooses content

It's biased toward a
particular modality

They use old course
syllabi

It's all clinical

FICTION

How the tests are built **reality**

The examinations are the result of a long process

Starts with a **practice analysis** conducted every 7 years

Survey of current social work practice

Relates to minimum knowledge and skills

necessary to perform social work safely at various educational and experience levels

In 2009, of 16,040 surveys distributed:

Surveys sent:
4,031 Canada;
12,009 U.S.

Usable response rate:
39.3% Canada;
40.1% U.S.

U.S. and Canadian responses substantially similar, allowing for creation of single North American examinations

How the tests are built *reality*

The examinations follow strict guidelines

Blueprints (what will be measured on the exam) are **built based on practice analysis results**

KSAs are identified and **weighting of content areas is determined**

Number of items in each content area **is determined** based on weighting decision

Psychometricians **assemble the blueprint**

ASWB subject matter experts **review the blueprint**

Valid tests must meet standards

Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 1999

Joint Committee on Standards
(American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Guidelines

Experience and psychometric expertise of Pearson VUE, our contract partner for the examinations

How the tests are built *reality*

The individual questions must meet standards

Readability is emphasized:

simple sentences, direct questions whenever possible, ambiguous words or words with double meanings eliminated when possible

Criticality is a requirement. Item must be testing knowledge critical to safe practice—no trivia.

Items must adhere to ***KSAs in blueprint***

All items must be pretested

before they can be used as a scored question on an examination

Test development resources available to you, www.aswb.org:

ASWB Practice Analysis

Full text and supporting documentation on the study of practice completed in 2009

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Statements

Complete listing of the discrete content statements used by writers to create test questions

What the test measures

Nothing

Test taking ability

FICTION

Reading ability

Values of the
dominant culture

What the test measures **reality**

The examinations measure minimum competence

Test reflects **widely accepted practice**
(not specific to geographic, cultural, or other settings)

Test measures knowledge **applicable across practice areas** (not knowledge of hospital social work, school social work, geriatric social work per se)

Every question has **one single correct answer**,
verified through the **pretest** process - test does not rely on tricks, deception, purposeful confusion

**North American
pass rates,
2011:**

Bachelors 78%

Masters 83%

Adv. Gen. 48%

Clinical 78%

How the test measures it

Scores improve
through retakes

Must pass all
sections

FICTION

Passing score is 70%

Scored on a curve

How the test measures it reality

The ASWB examinations have a North American passing score, the same in all jurisdictions

Anchor exams establish passing standard;
individual forms **equated** so ensure that overall difficulty
remains consistent

Score requirements (“70” or “75”) **are not percentages required**. Actual (“raw”) **scores are scaled** to reflect system used—not easier to pass one place than another.

Item development process and pretesting results in **highly reliable test questions** (decision consistency avg. 94%)

Equating
accounts for
variations in
individual item
difficulty;
adjusts raw
passing score
up or down
(slightly) to
keep overall
difficulty
consistent

The “70” | “75” requirements are analogous to km vs. mi—2 ways of describing the same distance

What the results mean **reality**

Examination results can only be viewed in the context of their intent and construction

The whole is what matters. Test-takers are not required to achieve minimum scores in individual content areas.

The test is about practice, not curriculum. The test measures practice competence. Social work degrees prepare students to become members of a profession.

The examinations measure minimum competence

necessary for safe practice. They do not measure excellence.

Although the practice analyses can alter test content and weighting, the purpose of the exam program has never changed.

The ASWB examinations and the social work community

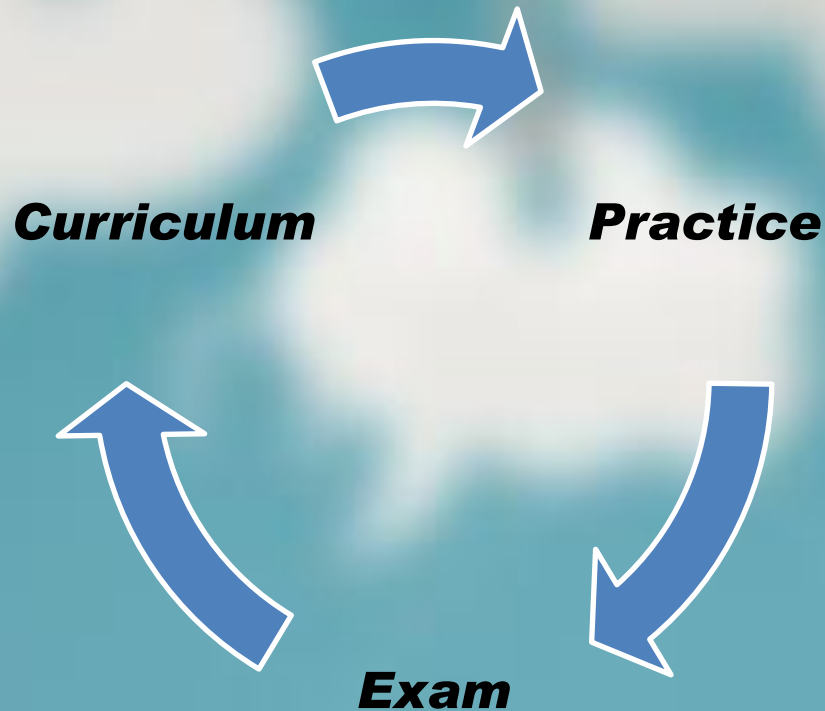
What's the relationship to EPAS?

Should we be teaching differently?

How can we collaborate?

How can we improve pass rates?

Collaboration, influence, impact



ASWB outreach to educators:

Consultation with individual programs

Participation in CSWE
Commission on Educational
Policy, CSWE Social Work
Roundtable

Presentations at BPD, CSWE,
NADD, etc.

Collaboration, influence, impact ***Improving performance***

1. Establish the basic tools needed

Reading skills – ASWB exams written at 10th grade level (not counting social work terms)

Critical thinking skills – ASWB exams contain questions that require problem-solving and reasoning ability

Anxiety management – the reality is that ASWB exams are high-stakes tests

Collaboration, influence, impact Improving performance

2. Encourage a thorough (and accurate) understanding of the test. www.aswb.org

Test construction— familiarity with test blueprint, ***KSAs***, basic purpose of test (minimal competence, public protection)

Item construction— familiarity with four-option multiple choice format; particularly use of ***QUALIFYING*** words (“FIRST,” “BEST,” “MOST,” etc.)

Administration details— test centers, time limits, candidate rules, etc.

Collaboration, influence, impact ***Improving performance***

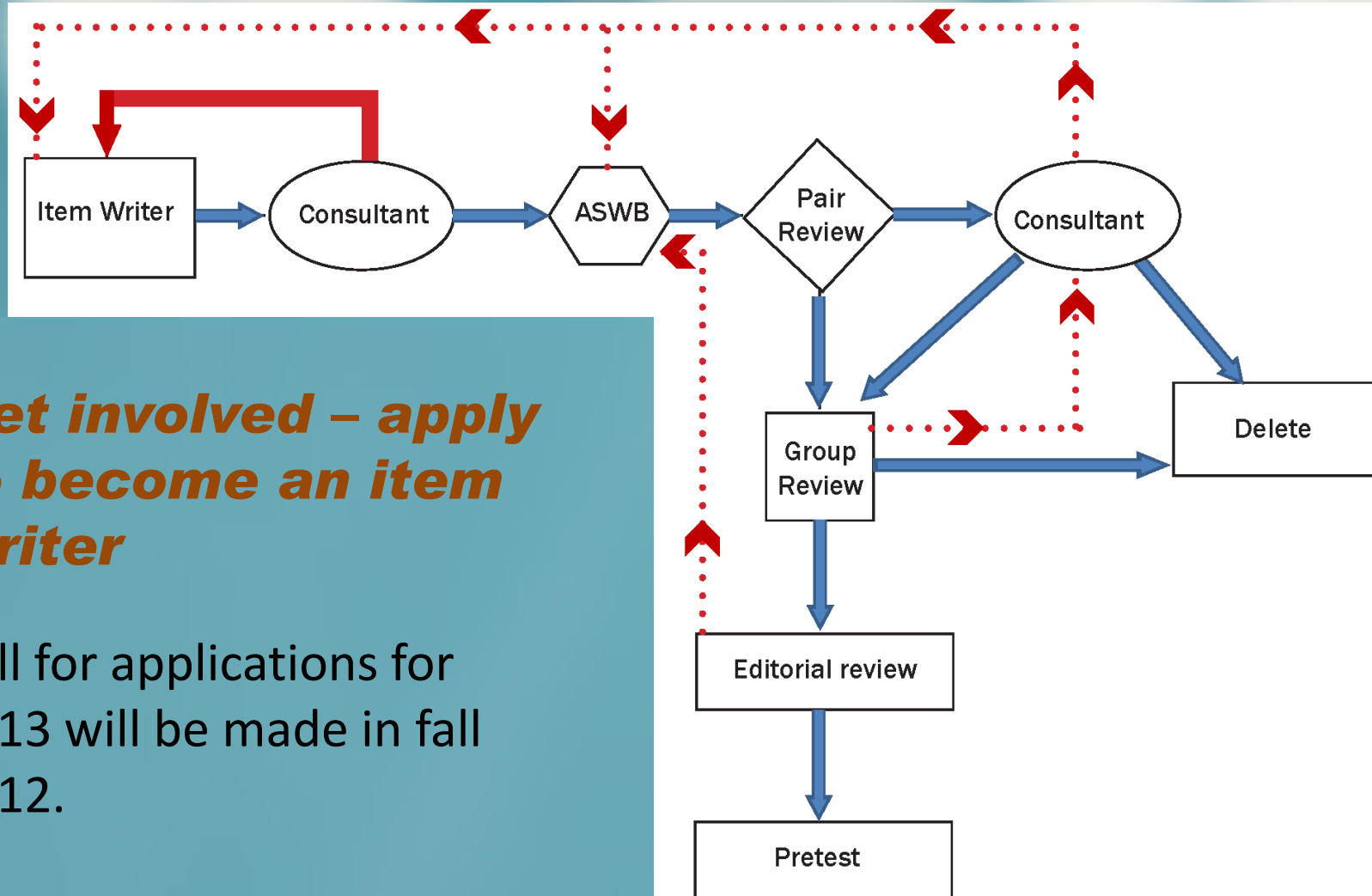
2. Encourage a thorough (and accurate) understanding of the test. www.aswb.org

Volunteer social workers , staff, and consultants work to be sure test questions are fair. ***Diverse groups of social workers:***

- Write the questions
- Edit the questions
- Take the exams and are included in pretest statistics
- Review questions that have statistics indicating bias, more than one possible answer, or other problems

The ASWB examinations and the social work community

Collaboration, influence, impact ***How the process works***



Get involved – apply to become an item writer

Call for applications for 2013 will be made in fall 2012.

Collaboration, influence, impact

Improving performance

3. Explore resources

ASWB group practice exam— complete, 170 question practice test, with rationales, intended for classroom use

ASWB study guides— hardcopy booklet containing construction information, references, sample questions and rationales

ASWB practice test— (for registered candidates only) Full-scale test with 30-day access and four-hour time limit, “look and feel” of actual test software

Collaboration, influence, impact
Improving performance

4. Ask questions, join the conversation

Email– email us directly: ***info@aswb.org***

Online community– ***ASWB on Facebook;***
ASWB on Twitter (@ASWB)

Thanks for listening.



Questions? Comments?