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## Bar exam pass rates climb in several states

Sheri Qualters / Staff reporter

December 04, 2008

Passage rates for the July bar examination rose in several states with historically high numbers of applicants, including California, Massachusetts and New York and in the Multistate Bar Examination portion of the test used in most jurisdictions.

In California, the percentage of applicants passing the bar exam rose by 5% despite a magnitude 5.4 earthquake that hit the Los Angeles area and briefly [disrupted the first day of the exam](#).

According to the State Bar of California's Committee of Bar Examiners, 61.7% of applicants passed this July's test, up from 56.1% in July 2007. In New York, 74.7% passed in July, compared with 70.6% the prior year, according to the New York State Board of Law Examiners.

In Massachusetts, 86.4% of test takers passed in July, according to Massachusetts Board of Bar Examiners data. That compares with 83% in the prior year, according to a National Conference of Bar Examiners report. The upward trend reflects national scores on the Multistate Bar Examination (MBE) portion of the test. The multiple choice section can count for up to half of an applicant's score depending on the state, said Erica Moeser, president of the National Conference, which designs the MBE. The national mean on the MBE portion of the test hit a record 145.60 out of a 200-point scale, up from 143.73 in July 2007, Moeser said.

"This is the highest it's ever been," Moeser said.

One possible explanation is the new attention law schools are giving to preparing students to take the bar examination, Moeser said. "A number are taking [such courses] seriously," she said.

A [growing number of law schools](#) have offered bar prep courses for credit since the American Bar Association's (ABA) Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar began allowing such programs in 2005. A resolution passed by the ABA's House of Delegates at this summer's ABA annual meeting allows law schools to make such programs mandatory.

High average LSAT scores for July 2008 bar exam takers who graduated from law school in the spring of 2008, also accounts for some of the strong performance on this summer's bar examination scores, Moeser said.