

Texas Surveying Exam Changes a Success

December 2023

On October 13, 2023, the Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (TBPELS) administered the first Texas Specific Surveying Exam (TSSE) to professional land surveyor applicants. This exam is the culmination of several years of research, data collection and analysis, and exam development. Finalizing and administering the TSSE is the final step in a historic change to the surveying registration process in Texas.

The exam change is part of the transition to a two-part examination process for surveyors to be registered in Texas. Registrants in Texas must pass both the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) Principles and Practice of Surveying (PS) exam and the TSSE, in whichever order they choose once their application is approved. This change was approved by the TBPELS in November of 2022, and was monitored, reviewed, and recommended to the Board by the Surveying Advisory Committee (SAC), as required by the Professional Land Surveying Practices Act and Board rules. A Professional Activities and Knowledge Study (PAKS) was first sent to all active Texas RPLSs and a blueprint for the exam was then developed from the data acquired. The TSSE exam content was derived utilizing existing surveying bank items carried over from the previous board and then further developed and reviewed by multiple workgroups of subject matter experts, all of whom are Texas RPLSs.

Surveying in Texas requires knowledge of its unique history, statutory laws and board rules; and surveying practices and procedures that must be evaluated prior to becoming a Texas RPLS. The Board and SAC members recognize that these unique topics are not covered by the NCEES PS exam. The TSSE supplements the NCEES PS exam and evaluates an RPLS candidate's knowledge and understanding of these specialized state-specific topics and contains more in-depth boundary analysis items.

TBPELS is pleased to report that the first implementation of the TSSE indicates that the hard work in preparing the exam has paid off. The first exam performed as expected with 98 total examinees and an overall pass rate of 49%, which is in line with historic RPLS exam pass rates. In addition, post-exam customer service polling shows that examinees were pleased with the delivery of the exam by TBPELS staff and with the exam venue, with an overall rating of 4.9 out of 5.

The board has worked to keep applicants well informed in the new exam process and the applicants are continuing to register and take the NCEES PS exam, which is offered year-round. Currently over 50 examinees have already taken the PS exam, with a pass rate in line with the national average.

To provide more opportunities for applicants, the TSSE exam will be offered more frequently – 3 times per year, rather than the 2 times per year the previous RPLS exam was offered. The TSSE 2024 dates are: March 22, June 21, and October 18. Information about the TSSE exam, including exam dates, application due dates, exam preparation, specifications, and reference materials is available on the TBPELS website at <https://pels.texas.gov/lsexams.htm>.

Per Coleen Johnson, TBPELS RPLS board member, “I was very pleased to see the results and passing rate of the first TSSE exam. This historic change in examination requirements has been a complete success due to the board’s timely communication of upcoming changes, the diligent work of the numerous subject matter experts who volunteered their time to develop the TSSE exam, the hard work of the TBPELS staff in the development and proctoring of the exam, and the members of the Surveying Advisory Committee (SAC) who have assisted and provided guidance in the process every step of the way.”

We would like to thank all involved for making this historic transition a success and we look forward to continuing to support the health, safety, and welfare of the public through an effective and efficient RPLS registration process.