

New York to Adopt Revamped Bar Exam by 2028



New Era for Legal Licensing in New York

New York announced on Wednesday that it will transition to a new version of the bar exam starting in July 2028. This updated test, known as the NextGen bar exam, was developed by the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) and represents a significant shift in how aspiring lawyers are assessed. The move aligns New York with 29 other states and jurisdictions that have already adopted the NextGen exam, which will begin its rollout in July 2026.

A Landmark Decision by the New York Court of Appeals

The New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest judicial authority, has approved the transition to the NextGen exam. With New York licensing approximately 14,000 new lawyers annually—more than any other jurisdiction—this decision is poised to have a broad impact on the legal community.

What Makes the NextGen Bar Exam Different?

The NextGen bar exam marks the first major overhaul of the national lawyer licensing test in 25 years. Its development began in 2021 with the goal of modernizing the assessment process. Unlike the current exam, which heavily emphasizes the memorization of laws, the NextGen test focuses on evaluating practical legal skills.

Key Features of the NextGen Exam:

Streamlined Format: The new test eliminates the three separate components of the current exam—the Multistate Bar Exam (200 multiple-choice questions), the Multistate Essay Exam, and the Multistate Performance Test.

Shorter Duration: The test will take nine hours to complete, compared to the current 12-hour format.

Digital Administration: The exam will be conducted entirely on computers, enhancing accessibility and convenience.

Score Portability: Candidates' scores can be transferred for bar admission in other states, though individual states will continue to determine their own passing scores.

Timeline for Implementation

States have the flexibility to adopt the NextGen exam between July 2026 and July 2028. The NCBE will phase out the current bar exam after the February 2028 administration. New York's decision to begin using the NextGen test in July 2028 places it among nine states, including Florida and Virginia, adopting the new exam on the same timeline.

States Opting for Alternative Paths

While the majority of states have embraced the NextGen exam, California and Nevada have opted for alternative approaches:

California: Developing a state-specific bar exam based on the current test, which will debut in February 2028 and can be administered remotely.

Nevada: Creating a new lawyer licensing process that includes supervised practice as a key component.

A New York-Specific Component in Development

In conjunction with adopting the NextGen exam, the New York Court of Appeals has established a committee to explore the addition of a New York-specific component. This initiative aims to ensure that new lawyers are well-versed in state-specific legal principles and practices.

What's Next for Aspiring Lawyers?

The adoption of the NextGen exam signifies a transformative step in the legal profession, emphasizing skills over rote memorization. For the thousands of law school graduates who sit for New York's bar exam each year, the new format promises a more streamlined and practical assessment process. As other states join the transition, the NextGen bar exam is set to become a national standard for legal licensing.

