



HELP STUDENTS BUILD READINESS FOR USMLE® STEP 1

CBSE: A PRACTICAL PLAYBOOK FOR MULTIPLE ADMINISTRATIONS

The NBME® Comprehensive Basic Science Exam (CBSE) is developed with the same rigor as the USMLE Step 1, providing both schools and students with actionable feedback on content mastery and exam readiness. Each administration delivers a detailed score report and an estimated probability of passing Step 1.

Since CBSE and Step 1 cover very similar content, CBSE performance can be used in conjunction with other information to assess readiness for Step 1. Please note that taking CBSE under different testing conditions than Step 1 may affect how reliably your CBSE score reflects your Step 1 readiness.

The value of CBSE is supported by performance data. A study analyzed 3,065 students from 31 medical schools who completed multiple CBSE administrations between 2019 and 2021 and took Step 1 before the passing standard increased and the exam results began to be reported as pass/fail on January 26, 2022. Among this cohort, 99.85% of students who scored above the CBSE low-pass range on their last CBSE attempt went on to pass Step 1 on their first attempt.

WHY SCHOOLS RELY ON THE CBSE



TARGETED, ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

Gain visibility into individual strengths and areas for improvement by discipline and organ system, enabling personalized study plans.



EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT

Multiple administrations help identify at-risk students sooner, allowing for timely intervention, adjusted timelines, and ongoing progress tracking.



USMLE-STYLE TESTING EXPERIENCE

Students practice with high-quality questions and content similar to Step 1, building the test-taking endurance needed for longer assessments.



CBSE “gives us an at-risk criteria and the ability to build a personalized study calendar based on results... It also gives students valuable exposure to 200 questions and a reflection on testing stamina.”

— KRISTY MOTTE, ED.D

INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR & DIRECTOR OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS
NARESH K. VASHISHT COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

SHARED PRACTICES

The following represents shared practices from interviewed schools with USMLE Step 1 pass rates above the national average:

EXAMPLE CADENCE FOR MULTIPLE CBSE ADMINISTRATIONS

To better prepare students planning to take Step 1 in May–July, consider administering the CBSE two to three times at 4–6 week intervals. This approach allows for early identification of at-risk students, targeted remediation, and measurable growth between exams.

EXAMPLE

BASELINE (NOV–DEC)

Establish a starting point for all students and identify those who may need early support. Use results to guide initial remediation and personalized study plans.

READINESS CHECK (MAR–APR)

Assess progress and current estimated probability of passing Step 1. Use detailed scoring feedback from the CBSE to refine study plans and confirm progress toward your Step 1 benchmark.

(OPTIONAL) TARGETED FOLLOW-UP

For students below the benchmark, provide additional time and resources, then reassess before Step 1 to help ensure readiness.

SUPPORTING AT-RISK STUDENTS

- ▶ **Track progress with [the INSIGHTS® dashboard](#):** Students can monitor changes over time, identify areas for growth, and filter question-level details to focus their study.
- ▶ **Incorporate the Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment (CBSSA):** Encourage students to use the CBSSA for additional practice and progress measurement, available through school vouchers or direct purchase.
- ▶ **Build targeted checks with Customized Assessment Services (CAS):** Create custom exams that mirror the [CBSE blueprint](#).

EFFECTIVELY USING SCORE RESULTS

- ▶ **Focus on trends and growth:** Emphasize progress over time rather than single-test results, comparing individual performance to prior attempts and cohort benchmarks.
- ▶ **Leverage the full suite of CBSE score reports and support:**
 - ▷ *Examinee Performance Report:* Overall performance, content areas, and estimated probability of passing within a week for each examinee
 - ▷ *Examinee Question-Level Feedback Report:* Performance of each examinee and a national group of examinees on each item
 - ▷ *Guidance for Using CBSE and CBSSA to Gauge Readiness for USMLE Step 1:* Recommendations for interpreting the full array of CBSE (and CBSSA) results when preparing for Step 1

[Descriptions and sample score reports](#) are available.

OPTIONAL: EARLY ADMINISTRATION OF CBSE

Consider administering the CBSE at the end of the first year as a **formative, low-stakes checkpoint**. Early administration can help gauge content retention, reduce test anxiety through early exposure to NBME-style questions, and build exam-day stamina in a realistic environment. Results from this early CBSE can provide a valuable baseline for tracking growth and tailoring support throughout the curriculum.

BEST PRACTICES FOR EARLY ADMINISTRATION:



SCHEDULE

End of Year 1 or start of Year 2, after foundational content is covered



ENVIRONMENT

Simulate actual testing conditions to build familiarity and stamina



COMMUNICATION

Frame the early CBSE as a diagnostic tool, focusing on growth and learning rather than high-stakes outcomes



FOLLOW-UP

Use results to guide individualized study plans and inform subsequent CBSE administrations

Results or outcomes may vary and depend on factors beyond NBME's control, such as student participation, individual study habits, faculty support and engagement, and/or variations in curriculum, among other things.