



NATIONAL BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN OPTOMETRY

May 5, 2026

Via First Class U.S. Mail & Email

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RE: NBEO® Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination (LSPE®)

Dear Members of the Patient Safety in Expanded Therapeutic Procedures Workgroup,

The National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO) recognizes the dedication of the members of Kentucky's Patient Safety in Expanded Therapeutic Procedures Workgroup to protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Kentucky. According to the Kentucky Board of Optometric Examiners, this workgroup was created to "provide expert guidance regarding training standards, credentialing, **competency verification** and patient safety protocols related to certain laser procedures."¹

Verifying competence is a crucial aspect of ensuring patient safety. The validity of any measure of competence depends on its ongoing adherence to specific and evidence-based protocols, such as the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* established by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (AERA et al., 2014). Any state with an expanded scope of practice such as Kentucky must recognize the importance of including a national, psychometrically validated examination as a required component of demonstrating competence in laser and surgical procedures.

Summary of Key Points

- Requiring a high-quality, standardized assessment of competence for optometric practice provides a layer of public protection, which is consistent with the purpose of the Patient Safety in Expanded Therapeutic Procedures Workgroup, and it supports the legal defensibility of licensure and certification decisions.
- The Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination (LSPE) developed by NBEO is the only nationally standardized, psychometrically validated exam currently in use in the United States to measure competence in these optometric procedures. More than 70 optometrists and ophthalmologists from across North America have contributed to its development and ongoing review.
- Courses and school curricula are valuable for training purposes, but neither one provides a standardized or psychometrically validated measure of competence.
- Several states accept LSPE as evidence of competence in laser and surgical procedures. Most recently, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Indiana adopted LSPE as a requirement for advanced procedure certification or licensure.

Importance of a Standardized, Validated Assessment

As health care professionals, optometrists are entrusted with the ocular and systemic health of their patients. To uphold public safety and maintain public trust, it is essential for state boards to verify that every provider has the knowledge and skills required to deliver safe and effective independent care. Educational courses and clinical training are

¹ <https://optometry.ky.gov/Optometry%20Documents/Workgroup%20Announcement.pdf>

necessary components of skill development, but they are not sufficient on their own to ensure competence across all licensure applicants. Course-based assessments are not designed or validated for high-stakes licensure decisions and may vary in content, grading criteria, and rigor. For this reason, optometrists, like all licensed healthcare professionals, must pass an examination to demonstrate competence before they are granted the privilege of independent patient care.

NBEO was established in 1951 to provide state boards with a uniform, reliable standard for determining competence in optometry. This benchmark brought legitimacy to optometry as a healthcare profession with a single, nationally standardized board exam series.

The development, administration, and scoring of a high-quality licensure exam follows rigorous psychometric standards, such as the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA et al., 2014). NBEO follows these guidelines, creating examinations that are:

- Developed and maintained with integral and ongoing input of a diverse, representative group of subject matter experts.
- Aligned with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for ensuring safe and effective practice at the point of licensure.
- Evaluated to ensure that results are reliable (i.e., consistent, repeatable).
- Sufficiently rigorous to ascertain that passing candidates have demonstrated competence in the assessed areas.
- Administered in a manner that ensures a fair, standardized experience for all candidates, while maintaining the security of exam content.

Because course-based assessments do not represent an independent and standardized exam requirement, they face many potential issues if used to verify competence:

- **Absence of psychometric validation:** Exams without established reliability, validity, and fairness standards may not provide an accurate assessment of competence and may be difficult to defend if challenged.
- **Lack of uniformity:** Course and instructor variability can result in inconsistent assessment of candidates.
- **Lack of fairness:** Examiners may be biased when evaluating candidates with whom they have a previous relationship, while candidates from outside an organization may be at a relative disadvantage.
- **Conflicts of interest:** Institutions offering training may be incentivized to pass their participants, even if the participant has not demonstrated competence.

About the NBEO Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination

To assist state boards in assessing competence according to the best practices described above, NBEO developed the Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination. LSPE is the only nationally standardized and independently administered examination designed specifically to assess competence in laser and minor surgical procedures for optometrists. It includes both a performance-based clinical skills component and a computer-based multiple-choice section that together evaluate:

- Laser procedures: SLT, Peripheral Iridotomy, YAG Capsulotomy
- Surgical procedures: Suturing, Chalazion Excision, Injections, and Anesthesia
- Knowledge of patient management, complications, and decision-making

Candidates may take the full LSPE or may instead take only the Laser Section or Surgical Section. For each of the Laser and Surgical Sections of the LSPE, candidates are required to pass both a skills portion and a multiple-choice portion to receive an overall passing score on that section of the exam.

The LSPE was developed over the course of eight years using rigorous psychometric standards according to national best practices. More than 70 optometrists and ophthalmologists from across North America have contributed to its development and ongoing maintenance through:

- A formal **Job Task Analysis** conducted via a nationwide survey, ensuring that the exam reflects the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for safe practice.
- Periodic **Standard Settings**, ensuring that the exam remains current with evolving standards of care.
- A diverse **Exam Development Committee**, composed of both optometrists and ophthalmologists from private practice, academia, and the VA, that reviews the exam on an ongoing basis and convenes annually for thorough, focused discussion.

The LSPE is administered at NBEO’s National Center of Clinical Testing in Optometry (NCCTO®) in Charlotte, North Carolina. All candidates complete the exam under the same controlled conditions. Evaluation and scoring criteria are carefully developed using psychometric best practices, and each candidate is evaluated by at least two examiners who are trained to provide an accurate and consistent review. This creates a reliable and equitable standard for all applicants, regardless of where they completed their training.

The LSPE is available for fourth-year optometry students, optometry residents, and optometric practitioners, and scheduling can be coordinated with NBEO’s Part III Patient Encounters and Performance Skills (PEPS®) examination and/or Injections Skill Examination (ISE®). Detailed information about LSPE is available on our website for both candidates and the public, including content outlines, evaluation forms, site and equipment details, registration information, and a brief video illustrating the exam.²

Adoption of LSPE in Other States

Several states recognize LSPE as evidence of laser and surgical competence:

- **South Dakota** requires passage of LSPE for all license applicants seeking advanced procedures certification who graduated after July 1, 2024.³
- **West Virginia** requires passage of LSPE for all optometry license applicants who graduated after May 1, 2025.⁴

² <https://www.optometry.org>

³ <https://doh.sd.gov/media/4cbaoybp/application-advanced-procedures-2025.pdf>

⁴ <https://optometry.wv.gov/laser-certification>

- **Indiana** requires passage of LSPE for all license applicants seeking advanced procedures certification who graduate after September 1, 2026.⁵
- **Six additional states** accept LSPE as proof of optometric laser and surgical competence.

Conclusion

As an independent organization with no affiliation to any individual school, course provider, or professional society, NBEO provides a neutral and objective standard. Requiring passage of the NBEO Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination ensures that all licensees demonstrate a uniform, independently verified level of competence, strengthening public protection. Because the development and administration of LSPE adheres to nationally accepted psychometric principles, NBEO is able to defend the exam and its outcomes.

NBEO invites your workgroup to visit the National Center of Clinical Testing in Optometry (NCCTO®) at its new location at 7910 Microsoft Way, Charlotte, North Carolina 28273. A visit would provide the opportunity to speak directly with NBEO leadership and staff, learn more about examination development and administration, and better understand the testing environment used to assess clinical competence. We have recently hosted several state boards of optometry, and they have all given us feedback that the time spent at NCCTO was worthwhile to understanding NBEO's exam development and administration process. We would love the opportunity to welcome you to our new facility.

Sincerely,



Jill Bryant, OD, MPH, FAAO, FSLs, FASOS
Executive Director

cc: Kentucky Board of Optometric Examiners
c/o Christi LeMay, KBOE Executive Director (christi.lemay@ky.gov)

⁵ <https://iar.iga.in.gov/code/current/852/1>