



# CERTIFIED ADMINISTRATOR OF SCHOOL FINANCE AND OPERATIONS® SFO®

## Exam Guidebook

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Horace Mann®

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## EXAM BLUEPRINT AND COMPETENCY GUIDE

The ASBO International SFO® Exam Blueprint and Competency Guide is based on a validated study that measures the type of activities, frequency, and percentage of time school business administrators spend on work-related responsibilities.

The study is an essential tool for program content developers and exam candidates who wish to ensure their training is aligned with the core knowledge and skills required for school finance operations. It also serves as a guide to:

- Help maximize work-related performance.
- Identify knowledge gaps.
- Develop a career path.

### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The SFO exam domain content consists of two areas: Accounting and School Business Management. All SFO candidates must pass an exam demonstrating mastery of these nationally recognized performance standards. This guide covers the major content areas for developing a study plan.

### ACCOUNTING DOMAINS

Management of Accounting Systems 13.33%
Task 1: Maintain accounting software through standards, procedures, and policies that preserve the integrity of financial data for reporting to all stakeholders.
Knowledge of:
a. Financial software
b. Overview of information technology
c. Internal controls
d. Process flows
e. Standards, policies, and procedures
f. Organization's accounting processes
g. System security

Skill in:
h. Adapting to different software
i. Analyzing
j. Establishing process flows
k. Establishing segregation of duties/security
<b>Task 2: Formulate and administer the chart of accounts based on local, state, provincial, and federal guidelines to document the consistent classification of balance sheet accounts, revenues, and expenditures, to enable comparison of financial data, and to provide a framework for controlling budget expenditures.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. State/provincial chart of accounts structure or standards
b. Generally accepted accounting principles
c. Internal policies and procedures
d. Reporting needs
e. Organizational structure
Skill in:
f. Developing chart of accounts
g. Classifying (coding) transactions
h. Auditing
i. Assigning budget responsibility
<b>Task 3: Analyze the accounts using statements and/or financial reports to determine the accuracy of the general ledger, and verify that all transactions have been properly recorded in the financial records.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. State, provincial, federal laws and regulations
b. Local budget
c. Organization's chart of accounts
d. Accounting principles and practices
Skill in:
e. Reconciling accounts
f. Analyzing transactions

g. Researching and implementing solutions
h. Identifying errors and proposing/posting adjustments
i. Interpreting financial reporting
<b>Task 4: Document and record district assets using policies and procedures to mitigate risk of loss through proper insurance coverage to safeguard the investments of the district.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Capital acquisition costs
b. State/provincial and federal regulations for required reporting
c. Capital budgeting
d. District policies and procedures for district assets
Skill in:
e. Analyzing
f. Auditing
g. Resolving discrepancies
h. Accounting
<b>Management of Accounting Functions 26.67%</b>
<b>Task 1: Administer the payroll functions according to regulations, contracts, and district procedures to meet district employment responsibilities (e.g., timeliness, accuracy, prevention of fraud).</b>
Knowledge of:
a. State, provincial, and federal laws and regulations
b. Employment contracts
c. District policies and procedures
Skill in:
d. Coordinating payroll activities
e. Auditing payroll registers
f. Resolving errors
<b>Task 2: Facilitate the accuracy of district billings and collections of district accounts receivable in order to meet financial obligations and be good stewards of public funds.</b>

Knowledge of:
a. Collections management
b. Sources of funding
c. Financial software tools
d. Billing procedures
Skill in:
e. Collecting
f. Negotiating
g. Analyzing
<b>Task 3: Facilitate timely, accurate payments to vendors for goods and services and proper accounting of accounts payable transactions with fiduciary responsibility.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Policies and procedures
b. Contracts
c. Internal controls
d. Financial software tools
Skill in:
e. Innovating new processes
f. Negotiating
g. Auditing
h. Analyzing
i. Developing reconciliation tools
<b>Task 4: Establish procedures that conform to local policies and state/provincial and federal statutes regarding the procurement of goods and services in order to provide the best value for district resources.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Procurement and bidding laws
b. Governmental vendor relations
c. Various school functions
d. Code of ethics/conflicts of interest

Skill in:
e. Analyzing and interpreting RFPs/quotes
f. Preparing RFPs
g. Evaluating multiple RFPs/quotes
h. Negotiating contracts
<b>Task 5: Create and monitor annual budgets adhering to the parameters established by local policies and guidelines and state/provincial and federal statutes.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. State/provincial/federal school finance laws
b. PreK-12 Education
c. Legislation
Skill in:
d. Forecasting revenues and expenditures
e. Forecasting student count
f. Analyzing various solutions under constraints
g. Preparing/presenting reports in layman's terms
h. Advising various stakeholders
<b>Task 6: Prepare financial reports for internal and external stakeholders that accurately reflect the financial condition of the district.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. District's financial condition
b. Principles of accounting, (e.g., GAAP, GASB, PSAS)
c. State/provincial/federal reporting requirements
Skill in:
d. Presenting information
e. Preparing reports in layman's terms
f. Interpreting financial data
g. Organizing financial documentation for efficient retrieval
h. Resolving financial discrepancies

**Task 7: Manage cash flow by monitoring the current period receipts and disbursements, as well as projecting future trends, to maximize resources and minimize borrowing and be able to discharge liabilities as they arise to avoid any crises of liquidity.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Investment strategies
- b. Economic trends (e.g., market rates)
- c. Investment laws and policies (e.g., State, Federal, Provincial)
- d. Banking
- e. Fund balance restrictions
- f. Organization's policies

Skill in:

- g. Cash flow forecasting
- h. Investing cash
- i. Recognizing trends
- j. Negotiating

**Task 8: Control capital and fixed assets through policies set forth, which protect the district assets and provide accurate and transparent reporting.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Capital acquisition costs
- b. State/provincial and federal regulations for required reporting
- c. Capital budgeting
- d. District policies and procedures for district assets

Skill in:

- e. Analyzing
- f. Auditing
- g. Resolving discrepancies
- h. Accounting

## SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT DOMAINS

### Financial Planning and Analysis 15.33%

Task 1: Serve as a school leader by having a shared vision for the organization and translating that vision into a comprehensive financial plan, based on integrity and commitment for the educational mission to inspire and motivate others to achieve a common goal.

Knowledge of:

- d. Business practices
- e. Group dynamics
- f. Education environmental
- g. Global awareness
- h. School finance

Skill in:

- i. Managing projects and processes
- j. Delegating
- k. Inspiring people
- l. Coaching
- m. Presenting
- n. Preparing a financial plan

Task 2: Review financial impact of strategic planning goals by analyzing and quantifying relevant data for optimal decision-making that leads to successful educational outcomes for the district.

Knowledge of:

- a. Strategic planning
- b. Financial statements
- c. Language of the industry
- d. Educational data systems
- e. Complexities of educational funding
- f. Educational cost drivers

Skill in:

- g. Analyzing financial data sets
- h. Collaborating



i. Summarizing data
j. Assessing industry landscape
<b>Task 3: Develop short- and long-term financial goals by evaluating relevant data to support district programmatic needs, instructional objectives, and good stewardship of financial resources.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Educational data systems
b. Organizational objectives
c. Strategic planning processes
d. Complexities of educational funding sources
e. Demographic trends
Skill in:
f. Goal-setting
g. Collaborating
h. Conceptualizing and formulating new ideas
i. Presenting
<b>Task 4: Evaluate financing options, including debt repayment strategies, with lenders to optimize funding for capital projects and other initiatives.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Investments
b. Debt financing
c. Banking industry
d. Financial needs (e.g., capital and other)
e. Policies, laws, and regulations
Skill in:
f. Analyzing investment and debt alternatives
g. Researching
h. Negotiating
<b>Task 5: Develop outside funding sources by identifying, soliciting and marketing potential areas of revenue to support overall educational goals.</b>

Knowledge of:
a. Available funding opportunities
b. Complexities of educational funding
c. Organizational objectives
d. Regulatory constraints
Skill in:
e. Conceptualizing and formulating new ideas
f. Marketing
g. Researching
h. Articulating objectives
i. Evaluating feasibility
j. Negotiating
<b>Task 6: Analyze relevant economic and demographic data by identifying, collecting, and monitoring all available sources of pertinent information to effectively and efficiently allocate limited resources.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Educational data systems
b. Complexities of educational funding (and sources of funding)
c. Sources of economic data and demographic data
d. Community support (willingness to pay)
Skill in:
e. Analyzing educational and economic data sets
f. Summarizing educational and economic data sets
g. Consolidating educational and economic data sets
h. Researching educational and economic data sets
i. Interpreting educational and economic data sets
<b>Task 7: Develop multi-year forecast by gathering/analyzing historical data in conjunction with future assumptions/indicators (e.g., projected program changes, economic factors, demographic data) to effectively plan for future resource requirements.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Educational data systems
b. Budgeting and forecasting processes
c. District goals and objectives

Skill in:
d. Estimating
e. Forecasting
f. Analyzing data
g. Interpreting financial data
h. Synthesizing
<b>Task 8: Estimate real estate property tax revenues by evaluating historical data, current local economic conditions (e.g., home sales, zoning laws, collection rates), and regulatory changes to predict future cash inflows.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Local and state/provincial tax structures
b. Economic trends (e.g., local, state/provincial, national)
c. Real estate laws and trends
Skill in:
d. Estimating/forecasting
e. Analyzing data
f. Interpreting tax laws
<b>Budgeting and Reporting Activities 10.67%</b>
<b>Task 1: Project student enrollment by using scientific methodology (e.g., cohort survival rates) to establish reasonable budget assumptions in order to properly align resources (e.g., human and capital) with estimated funding levels.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Historical and emerging local and regional trends
b. Statistical methods
Skill in:
c. Projecting
d. Analyzing
e. Interpreting data sets
f. Budgeting

**Task 2: Evaluate instructional program costs by reviewing financial data to determine if program outcomes have met desired objectives.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Organization's instructional programs
- b. Organization's goals and objectives
- c. Resource allocation

Skill in:

- d. Interpreting financial data
- e. Evaluating various competing initiatives
- f. Evaluating program outcomes vs financial goals

**Task 3: Develop annual budgets through collaborative efforts that provide resources for student and program needs that are consistent with the assumptions, goals, and objectives of the district to produce parameters and guidelines for the expenditures of funds.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Organization's goals and objectives (align budget assumptions)
- b. Budgeting process (e.g., budgeting software, tools)
- c. Economic and demographic trends
- d. Legal regulations

Skill in:

- e. Budgeting
- f. Collaborating
- g. Presenting

**Task 4: Manage grant activities by researching and implementing grant requirements, including tracking and financial reporting, to maximize expenditure of grant funds in compliance with grant regulations.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Grant regulations and accountabilities
- b. Organization's financial reporting systems (e.g., chart of accounts)

Skill in:
c. Researching
d. Organizing grant data
e. Gathering pertinent data and reporting
f. Monitoring
<b>Task 5: Prepare for the annual audit by gathering organizational data, closing of the books in a timely manner, and preparing reports (e.g., working papers, schedules) to facilitate an efficient and accurate audit process.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Organization's financial data systems
b. Auditing process
c. Authoritative accounting and auditing standards (e.g., GAAP, GASB, PSAS)
d. State/provincial/federal financial reporting requirements
e. State/provincial/federal taxing authorities
Skill in:
f. Accounting and reporting
g. Reconciling
h. Analyzing
i. Consolidating
j. Verifying data integrity
<b>Risk Management Activities 7.33%</b>
<b>Task 1: Evaluate existing risks by performing an audit of district resources to discover weaknesses that may exist to minimize losses.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Internal audit methods
b. Organizational policies
c. Organizational structure
d. Industry best practices
Skill in:
e. Evaluating potential risks
f. Identifying weakness
g. Assessing

**Task 2: Address results of risk audit by investigating areas of weakness and developing a corrective action plan to mitigate loss.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Risk mitigation strategies

Skill in:

- b. Assessing best mitigation strategies
- c. Implementing corrective actions
- d. Organizing
- e. Articulating recommendations

**Task 3: Conduct annual evaluation of insurance plans by comparing existing coverage against risk assessment to determine adequate coverage, and evaluate costs to obtain the best value and minimize loss exposure.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Insurance policies
- b. Insurance terminology
- c. Organization's physical assets
- d. Areas of potential liability
- e. Industry standards (e.g., best practices)

Skill in:

- f. Evaluating
- g. Interpreting data
- h. Researching
- i. Negotiating

**Task 4: Manage insurance plans by actively monitoring and handling claims and implementing loss prevention strategies to mitigate and prevent future losses.**

Knowledge of:

- a. Insurance claims practices
- b. Loss prevention strategies
- c. Organization's insurance policy parameters

Skill in:
d. Organizing data
e. Monitoring claims
f. Researching best strategies to address risk
g. Articulating recommendations
h. Training staff
<b>Management of School Facilities 7.33%</b>
<b>Task 1: Update facility master plan in cooperation with fellow administrators and pertinent stakeholders (e.g., community, board of education, skilled professionals) through the collection and analysis of relevant data to provide a list of short- and long-term capital needs for a safe and effective instructional environment.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. School facilities
b. Community expectations
c. District instructional programs and space requirements
d. Student enrollment and space requirements
e. Financing options and regulations
f. Construction cost estimates
g. Construction trades
Skill in:
h. Moderating discussions with various stakeholders
i. Coordinating group meetings
j. Interviewing architects and design professionals
k. Evaluating information from architects and contractors
l. Delegating responsibilities
m. Forecasting financial aspects of future projects
n. Developing recommendations for options and alternatives
o. Developing a bidding process/RFP
<b>Task 2: Oversee the operation and maintenance of school campuses using established metrics to provide a clean, safe, and comfortable instructional environment including energy- and cost-efficient operations.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. School facilities

b. Staffing level requirements
c. Materials and equipment requirements
d. Contracted services options
e. District programming needs (e.g., instructional, co-curricular, extracurricular, non-instructional)
f. Energy conservation practices
g. Building trades (e.g., plumbing, electrical, HVAC)
h. Hazardous materials regulations
i. Utility cost and usage
j. Local and state/provincial building codes
Skill in:
k. Developing district energy standards
l. Evaluating performance against standards (e.g., local/industry benchmarks, past performance)
m. Evaluating performance of operation and maintenance employees
n. Evaluating in-house versus contractor-provided services
o. Aligning training resources for staff (e.g., energy, conservation, occupational health, safety)
<b>Task 3: Oversee new construction and renovations, within established timelines and budgets working with stakeholders (e.g., administrators, architects, engineers, construction manager, building committees, special interest groups), to provide adequate facilities for student learning.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. School facilities
b. Space requirements for instructional programs and student enrollment
c. State/provincial and federal regulations
d. Financing options and regulations
e. Overview of construction trades
Skill in:
f. Evaluating building trades performance
g. Assessing performance of a diverse team
h. Tracking, analyzing, and presenting project budget, costs, and cash flow information
i. Organizing a functional construction schedule and district logistics
j. Preparing and explaining periodic financial reports
<b>Track 4: Develop and maintain a comprehensive safety and security plan utilizing state/provincial and federal resources to provide a safe and secure learning environment.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. District facilities
b. Safety hazards
c. Potential threats



d. Security best practices
Skill in:
e. Conducting a risk assessment
f. Evaluating vulnerability of district facilities
g. Coordinating practice drills
h. Evaluating and updating district safety protocols and crisis response plan
i. Establishing and coordinating a district team
<b>Management of Information Systems 4%</b>
<b>Task 1: Assist in developing a technology plan by prioritizing district needs and budgeting for short- and long-term costs to account for new and changing technology.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. District needs for technology
b. New and changing technology
c. Technology infrastructure
Skill in:
d. Facilitating a plan for future growth
e. Forecasting growth and costs
f. Evaluating financing options for future purchases
g. Collaborating
<b>Task 2: Maintain technology systems (e.g., hardware, software, peripheral, networking) by selecting, evaluating, and purchasing components in order to control access, provide ease of use, and protect data integrity.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Software and hardware
b. Technology infrastructure
c. Changing technology
d. Data security best practices
e. Organization's facilities
Skill in:
f. Reviewing the assessment of the vulnerability of district network
g. Providing oversight of security for confidential/sensitive data
h. Evaluating district software needs
i. Planning for efficient purchases of technology needs

j. Planning and evaluating condition of current technology for future replacement and budget forecasting
k. Developing a data recovery plan
<b>Task 3: Oversee telecommunication systems in order to provide reliable and appropriate access by selecting and evaluating providers, software, equipment, and planning for short- and long-term costs.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. New and changing technology
b. District needs
c. Regulations and funding sources
d. Organization's facilities
Skill in:
e. Facilitating solutions with various agencies (e.g., 911 with VOIP transition)
f. Negotiating efficient contracts with service providers
g. Aligning training resources with changes in technology
<b>Management of Human Resource Functions 10.67%</b>
<b>Task 1: Manage hiring new employees by maintaining compliance with applicable laws and regulations and using best practices to attract and retain talented staff.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. State/provincial and federal labor laws
b. Reporting requirements
c. Job descriptions
Skill in:
d. Developing and implementing recruitment process for attracting and retaining qualified candidates
e. Coordinating an effective hiring process
f. Interviewing
g. Conducting effective background checks of candidates
<b>Task 2: Develop a comprehensive compensation structure using job and salary/benefit analysis which properly matches job description and responsibility to maintain equity and competitiveness.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Market compensation rates (e.g., regional, state/province, industry-wide)
b. Contract structure
c. Regulations governing contracts and compensation

Skill in:
d. Negotiating and writing employee contracts
e. Evaluating total compensation plans
f. Evaluating job descriptions
<b>Task 3: Facilitate staff development and training programs by assessing current knowledge and skills of staff, identifying needs, providing relevant opportunities (both internal and external), and evaluating the effectiveness of programs offered to provide personal and professional development.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. District goals
b. Staff responsibilities
c. Advancements and opportunities for improvement
Skill in:
d. Translating district goals into related needs
e. Assessing employee skills and knowledge
f. Developing needs assessments
g. Identifying programs that fill related needs
h. Coordinating cross-training efforts
i. Coordinating training programs
j. Negotiating vendor contracts for training opportunities
k. Evaluating specific intended outcomes of training program
<b>Task 4: Manage evaluation process by setting clear and consistent evaluation criteria, maintaining evaluation tools, utilizing goal-setting to define expected outcomes, and using timely and constructive feedback to evaluate and improve employee performance and job satisfaction.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Local, state/provincial and federal regulations
b. Best management practices and theories
Skill in:
c. Developing and facilitating employee improvement plans
d. Coaching direct reports with specific feedback on job performance
e. Writing and evaluating effective and measurable goals
f. Writing and evaluating effective evaluation tool
<b>Task 5: Manage personnel administration by maintaining systems, forms, and processes, in order to follow current laws and regulations, to prepare timely state/provincials and federal reporting, and to keep sensitive information secure and confidential.</b>

Knowledge of:
a. State/provincial and federal regulations
b. Reporting requirements
Skill in:
c. Evaluating procedures and implementing procedural changes
d. Securing sensitive information to fullest extent of law
e. Evaluating personnel administration process
f. Developing a schedule and process to dispose of non-required documents
<b>Task 6: Manage employee benefit programs that provide proper fringe benefit levels for employees while utilizing best practices to contain costs and to attract and retain quality employees.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. Insurance programs and potential plan design changes
b. Employee contracts
c. State/provincial and federal regulations
d. State/provincial pension plan offerings
Skill in:
e. Administering different insurance options including fully-funded insurance and self-insurance
f. Evaluating pension plan offerings and overall program health
g. Evaluating vendors
h. Developing alternative benefit plans with associated costs
i. Managing employee paid time off at appropriate levels
<b>Management of Ancillary Services 4.67%</b>
<b>Task 1: Manage transportation services using best practices to provide safe and reliable student transportation.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. District demographics and infrastructure
b. Community expectations
c. Regional and industry benchmarks
d. State/provincial and federal regulations
e. District policies and procedures
Skill in:
f. Developing RFPs for contractor-provided services
g. Evaluating in-house versus contractor-provided transportation services

h. Utilizing software for routing efficiency
i. Evaluating schedules and start/end times
j. Evaluating bus fleet, bus loads, and student ride times
k. Analyzing driver and staff training programs
l. Assessing the safety and risks of bus stop locations
<b>Task 2: Manage food service programs using best practices, proper financial systems, and timely reporting to provide nutritional meals to students to support classroom learning.</b>
Knowledge of:
a. National School Breakfast and National School Lunch programs
b. State/provincial and federal regulations
c. Appropriate accounting guidelines
Skill in:
d. Evaluating in-house versus contractor-provided food service
e. Aligning staff training programs with requirements
f. Evaluating financial results and projecting future program needs
g. Analyzing participation and reimbursement rates
h. Tracking and projecting cash flow of program