EXAM ELIGIBILITY PATHWAY SCENARIOS FOR WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM – LEVEL 3 (DS3)

released April 2026

The purpose of this pamphlet is to supplement the New Mexico Environment Department Utility Operator Certification Program *DS3 Operator Guidebook* for the purposes of helping to explain the allowable substitutions of eligibility criteria to sit for the DS3 operator certification exam.

Standard Pathway

The standard pathway for being eligible to set for the DS3 operator certification exam is to meet the following criteria. [Reference: Paragraph 3 of Subsection A of 20.7.4.22 NMAC]

References	Description
22.A.3	High school graduation, or general equivalency diploma, four years of experience and successful completion of fifty training credits **(HS/GED) + (4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)**

Definition of "Experience"

"Experience" means actual work experience, full or part-time, as an operator in the fields of public water supply or public wastewater treatment; work experience in a related field may be accepted at the discretion of the NMED. [Reference: Subsection K of 20.7.4.7 NMAC]

Substitution of Eligibility Criteria

The rules under Subsection B of 20.7.4.22 NMAC offer allowable substitutions of eligibility criteria. The most overarching of the substitution rules are listed below.

References	Description
22.B.1	In no case shall the actual experience be less than one year for any level except as in Subparagraph (d) of Paragraph (2) of Subsection B of this section [20.7.4.22 NMAC].
22.B.2	Education may be substituted for the basic requirements or used for training credits as follows. In no case may the same education serve both as a substitution for experience and as training credits except as provided in this section [20.7.4.22 NMAC].

Primary Substitution Pathways

The referenced rules listed below allow the following substitutions in the eligibility criteria for qualifying to sit for the DS3 operator certification exam. "References" are the specific paragraph and/or subparagraph numbers under Subsection B of 20.7.4.22 NMAC.

References	Description
22.B.2.a	One year of additional experience may be substituted for the high school graduation or general equivalency diploma requirement for all levels except level 4. **(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)** **+ ~~(HS/GED +~~ (1 year additional Experience)**
22.B.2.d	An associate's degree for a 2-year program in an approved school in the water and/or wastewater field and twelve months of actual experience in that field (which may be accrued before, during, or after the school program) may be substituted for the requirements of a level 3. **(Assoc. degree for 2-yr prog. in approved school in Water/Wastewater field)** **+ (12 Months actual Experience in that field)**
22.B.2.e	Completion of at least three years of actual Experience in the water and/or wastewater field plus high school diploma or equivalent (HS/GED), plus 15 semester hours of successfully completed college education directly related to the water or wastewater (Wtr/WW) field may be substituted for any level up to and including level 3. **(3 Years actual Experience in Water/Wastewater) + (HS/GED)** **+ (15 college semester hours completed in Water/Wastewater)**
22.B.2.f	A bachelor's degree for a major directly related to the water or wastewater field plus two years of actual Experience in that field may be substituted for any level up to and including level 3. **(Bachelor's degree in directly related Wtr/WW field) + (2 Years actual Experience in that Wtr/WW field)**

Substitution Conversion Factors

The referenced rules provide the following conversion factors for substitution of certain eligibility criteria for qualifying to sit for the operator certification exam. "References" are the specific paragraph and/or subparagraph numbers under Subsection B of 20.7.4.22 NMAC.

Reference*	Description
22.B.2.b	No more than one year (30 semester hours) of successfully completed college education in a non-related field may be substituted for any additional 6-months of the required experience.
22.B.2.c	One year of an approved vocational school in the water and/or wastewater field may be substituted for only one additional year of the required experience
22.B.3	Full time water and wastewater laboratory experience may be substituted for operator experience in a respective field at a rate of 25 percent of the actual experience held.

Combination Substitution Scenarios

Based on the conversion factors listed above, more than one allowed substitution of eligibility criteria might be proposed on an operator certification application submitted to the NMED-UOCP for consideration. The NMED-UOCP will review an individual's specific circumstances and make decisions on a case-by-case basis for proposed combination substitutions in alignment with the rules.

The following are some examples of possible combination substitutions that may be applicable to an individual's circumstances. This is not a comprehensive list of all possible combination substitutions. "References" are the specific paragraph and/or subparagraph numbers under Subsection B of 20.7.4.22 NMAC.

~~~~~~~~~~Example 1 of Combination Substitution Scenarios~~~~~~~~~~

References	Description
22.B.2.a	One year of additional experience may be substituted for the high school graduation or general equivalency diploma requirement for all levels except level 4. **(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)** **+ ~~(HS/GED +~~ (1 year additional Experience)**

Combined with

22.B.2.b	No more than one year (30 semester hours) of successfully completed college education in a non-related field may be substituted for any additional 6-months of the required experience. **(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)** **+ ~~(HS/GED + (1 yr. additional Exp.)~~ (1-yr. college ed.) + (6-month additional Exp.)**
~~~~~~~~~~

~~~~~~~~~~Example 2 of Combination Substitution Scenarios ~~~~~~~~~~

References Description

22.B.2.a One year of additional experience may be substituted for the high school graduation or general equivalency diploma requirement for all levels except level 4.

(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)
+ ~~(HS/GED +~~ (1 year additional Experience)

Combined with

22.B.2.c One year of an approved vocational school in the water and/or wastewater field may be substituted for only one additional year of the required experience

(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)
+ ~~(HS/GED + (1 year additional Experience)~~ (1-yr. approved vocational school)

~~~~~~~~~~Example 3 of Combination Substitution Scenarios ~~~~~~~~~~

References Description

22.A.3 High school graduation, or general equivalency diploma, four years of experience and successful completion of fifty training credits

(HS/GED) + (4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)

22.B.1 In no case shall the actual experience be less than one year for any level except as in Subparagraph (d) of Paragraph (2) of Subsection B of this section [20.7.4.22 NMAC].

22.B.2.a One year of additional experience may be substituted for the high school graduation or general equivalency diploma requirement for all levels except level 4.

(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)
+ ~~(HS/GED +~~ (1 year additional Experience)

Combined with

22.B.3 Full time water and wastewater laboratory experience may be substituted for operator experience in a respective field at a rate of 25 percent of the actual experience held.

(4 years Experience) + (50 hours approved training credit)
+ ~~(HS/GED + (1 year additional Experience)~~
(4 years full time water and wastewater laboratory Exp.