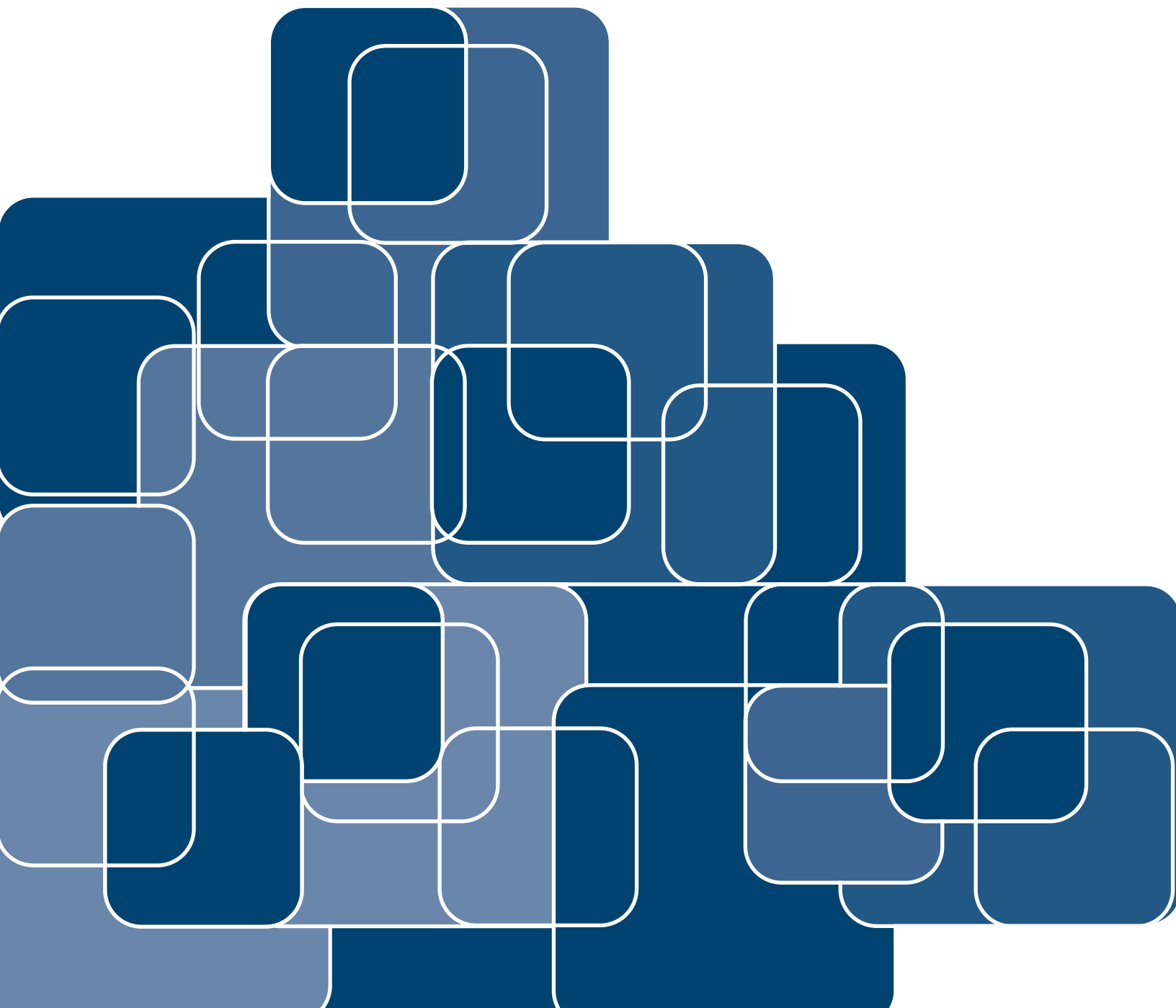


# State High School Exit Exams: A Move Toward End-of-Course Exams

August 2008





**Center on Education Policy**

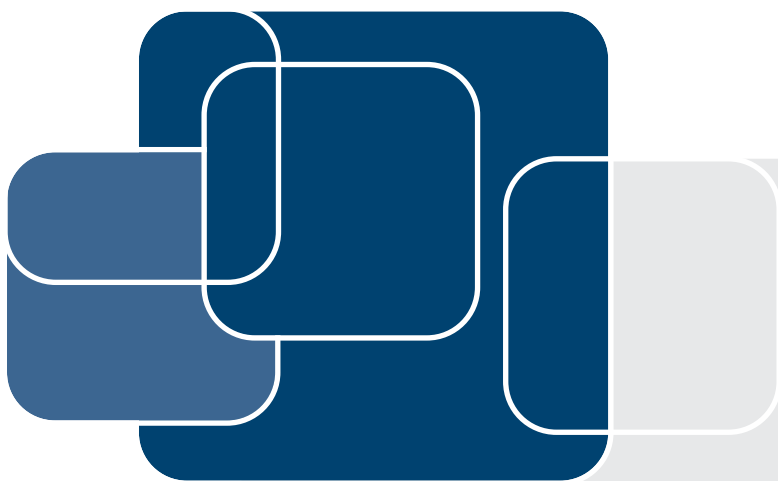
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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary and Study Methods</b> . . . . .	<i>1</i>
Key Findings . . . . .	<i>1</i>
Impacts of Exit Exams . . . . .	<i>1</i>
New Developments . . . . .	<i>2</i>
More States Adopting End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>2</i>
Recommendations . . . . .	<i>3</i>
Study Methods . . . . .	<i>3</i>
State Survey Methods . . . . .	<i>4</i>
Methods for Phone Interviews of States Moving to End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>4</i>
Other Data Sources . . . . .	<i>5</i>
Criteria for Including States in Our Survey . . . . .	<i>5</i>
<b>Chapter 1: New Developments</b> . . . . .	<i>11</i>
Introduction . . . . .	<i>11</i>
Key Findings . . . . .	<i>11</i>
Number of States with Mandatory Exit Exams Stays the Same . . . . .	<i>12</i>
Total Number of States and Students Affected . . . . .	<i>12</i>
Washington Begins Implementation of Exit Exams . . . . .	<i>14</i>
More States Consider Implementing Exit Exams . . . . .	<i>14</i>
More States Move Toward End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>16</i>
Five States Completely Moving to End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>18</i>
Three States Will Implement a Dual Testing System . . . . .	<i>20</i>
Six Additional States Consider End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>20</i>
Legal Challenges to Exit Exams . . . . .	<i>21</i>
Arizona . . . . .	<i>21</i>
California . . . . .	<i>22</i>
Some New Developments on Alternative Paths to Graduation . . . . .	<i>23</i>
Developments in Alternatives for General Education Students . . . . .	<i>25</i>
Recent Reports Challenge High School Exit Exams . . . . .	<i>27</i>
Exit Exams Do Not Affect Student Achievement . . . . .	<i>27</i>
Several Recent Reports Challenge California’s Exit Exam . . . . .	<i>27</i>
<b>Chapter 2: Understanding the Move Toward End-of-Course Exams</b> . . . . .	<i>31</i>
Introduction . . . . .	<i>31</i>
Key Findings . . . . .	<i>31</i>
Participating States . . . . .	<i>32</i>
Reasons for Adopting End-of-Course Exams . . . . .	<i>32</i>



- Improving Accountability . . . . . 32
- Increasing Rigor in Curriculum . . . . . 34
- Aligning Curriculum to Academic Standards . . . . . 34
- Use of End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 35
  - College Readiness and Placement . . . . . 35
  - Employment Readiness . . . . . 36
- Use of Data Generated from End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 36
- Overall Positive Response to End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 37
  - Support from Education Stakeholders . . . . . 37
  - Support from Teachers and Parents . . . . . 37
- Challenges Associated with the Use of End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 38
  - Providing EOC Results to School Districts in a Timely Manner . . . . . 39
  - Adopting Multiple EOCs May Increase Frequency of Testing . . . . . 39
  - The Challenges of Remediating Students Who Do Not Pass EOCs . . . . . 39
- Recommendations Regarding End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 40
  - Phase in End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 40
  - Adopt End-of-Course Exams in Consultation with Stakeholders. . . . . 40
  - Review State Content Standards . . . . . 41
  - Prepare Teachers for Implementation of End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 41
  - Consult Other States Regarding End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 41
- Conclusions . . . . . 42

**Profiles of State Exit Exam Systems . . . . . 43**

**References . . . . . 43**

## Tables, Figures, and Boxes

### Executive Summary and Conclusions

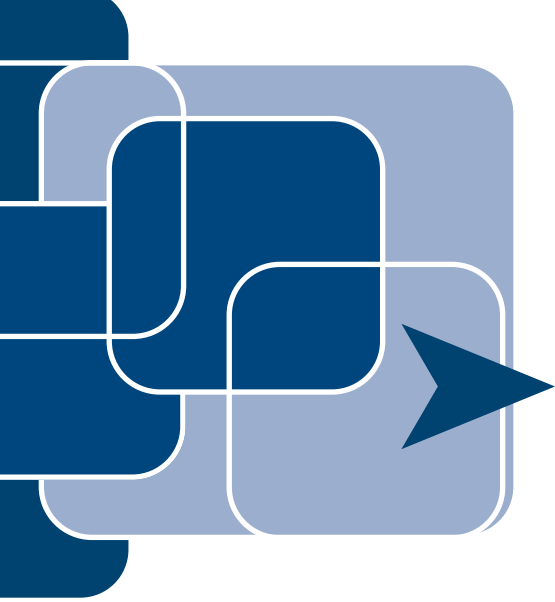
**Table 1.** Major Characteristics of State Exit Exams . . . . . 5

### Chapter 1

- Box 1.** Use of College Entrance Exams and Work Readiness Test as Graduation Requirements . . . 13
- Figure 1.** States with Mandatory Exit Exams . . . . . 14
- Table 2.** Percentage of Public High School Students Enrolled in States with Exit Exams . . . 14
- Figure 2.** Types of Exit Exams States Are Using or Plan to Use . . . . . 17
- Table 3.** Moving Toward End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 18
- Table 4.** Alternative Paths to Graduation, 2007 . . . . . 24

### Chapter 2

**Table 5.** Summary of the Status of Participating States that are Moving Toward End-of-Course Exams . . . . . 33



# Executive Summary and Study Methods

Since 2002, the Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent nonprofit organization, has been studying state high school exit examinations—tests students must pass to receive a high school diploma. This is CEP’s seventh annual report on exit exams. The information in this report comes from several sources: our survey of states that have mandatory exit exams, media reports, state Web sites, and interviews with state and district officials.

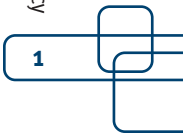
This report focuses on new developments in high school exit exam policies that have occurred over the past year. It specifically focuses on the states’ move away from minimum-competency exams and comprehensive exams that are aligned to state standards in several subjects, and toward end-of-course (EOC) exams that assess mastery of the content of a specific high school course.

The bulleted points that follow summarize CEP’s major findings from this year’s study and our recommendations for improving the implementation of state high school exit exams.

## Key Findings

### Impacts of Exit Exams

- ▶ **During 2007-08, the number of states withholding diplomas based on students’ performance on state-mandated high school exit exams increased by one (Washington State).** Now a total of 23 states require students to take and pass those tests to receive high school diplomas. Three more states (Arkansas, Maryland, and Oklahoma) will begin withholding diplomas within the next few years, leading to a total of 26 states with such policies by 2012.
- ▶ **The number of states with current or planned exit exam policies remains the same as last year at 26 states.** Three additional states (Connecticut, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) have considered adopting high school exit exams. In the face of public opposition, Oregon and Pennsylvania state officials have opted to allow the use of multiple measures, including the option of passing state exams, in their requirements for graduation.
- ▶ **High school exit examinations have a significant impact on American education.** Today, 68% of the nation’s public high school students attend school in the 23 states with such policies. By 2012, when three more states implement high school exit exam requirements, approximately 74% of the nation’s public high school students will be affected.



- ▶ **The impact of exit exams is even more striking for students of color.** Today, 75% of students of color attend public schools in states that require passage of exit exams; by 2012, more than 84% of students of color will live in such states.

## New Developments

- ▶ **California settled a lawsuit that challenged the fairness of its high school exit exam, but Arizona continues to struggle with two longstanding lawsuits.** One lawsuit challenges the constitutionality of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)—the state's exit exam. The other lawsuit seeks to suspend AIMS as a graduation requirement for English language learners.
- ▶ **States continue to develop and refine alternative paths to graduation.** All 23 states that currently withhold diplomas based on students' performance on mandated high school exit exams have alternative measures for students with disabilities; 18 states have them for general education students; and 3 states have alternative measures specifically for English language learners. These alternative paths may play a major role for students with disabilities and English language learners in some states, even though, with few exceptions, alternative measures may affect a very small percentage of students overall.

## More States Adopting End-of-Course Exams

- ▶ **States continue to move toward end-of-course exams.** In 2002, only 2 states used end-of-course exams. During school year 2007-08, 4 states had policies requiring end-of-course exams. By 2015, 11 states will rely on end-of-course exams and 3 more will implement a dual testing system that includes end-of-course exams. A total of 14 states expect to use end-of-course exams by 2015, an increase of 12 since 2002.
- ▶ **State education officials report many reasons for adopting end-of-course exams.** Almost all states that have adopted or are moving toward adopting end-of-course exams report that they are doing so to improve overall accountability, increase academic rigor, and improve alignment between state standards and curriculum.
- ▶ **A few are beginning to consider how to use the assessments to measure college and work readiness.** While all state education officials interviewed reported using end-of-course exams as a tool for ensuring greater accountability, only a few are beginning to consider how to use the assessment as a measure of college and work readiness.
- ▶ **Stakeholders highlighted many different ways that data from end-of-course exams can be used.** Some interviewees reported that end-of-course exam data, when compared to other test data available, allows for better assessment of content mastery. District administrators spoke about the opportunity of using end-of-course exam data to inform classroom instruction as well as identify areas of professional development for teachers.
- ▶ **End-of-course exams are supported by stakeholders.** End-of-course exams have been generally supported by legislators, the business community, parents, and teachers, according to interviewees.<sup>1</sup> Most questions and concerns about end-of-course exams have centered on the implementation timeline for the exams and the impact that the exams would have on graduation requirements.
- ▶ **States face logistical challenges associated with implementing end-of-course exams.** Logistical challenges include managing tight timelines required to develop multiple exams or figuring out how to get exam results back to school districts quickly. Other challenges reported include developing remediation for students who do not pass the exams and addressing concerns about the length and frequency of testing.

<sup>1</sup> Interviewees included state education officials, district administrators, and national testing experts.

- ▶ **Study participants recommend that states phase in their planned end-of-course exams over time.** Interviewees also cited the importance of consulting with teachers and other education stakeholders in states that have decided to adopt end-of-course exams. In addition, many interviewees stressed the importance of reviewing state academic standards to ensure that they are rigorous and well-defined before implementing end-of-course exams.

## Recommendations

- ▶ **Considering the vast number of students affected by state-mandated high school exit exams, more funding should be allocated to research aimed at better understanding the impact of these exams.** Much more work needs to be done to understand the effect of these exams on dropout rates, their impact on curriculum and instruction, and their impact on students from low-income families and children of color.
- ▶ **State governments should move immediately to collect and release data on final passage rates on these tests and the rate of students using alternative paths to graduation.** In the information supplied for this report, states frequently submit initial passage rates but not the final or cumulative rates—that is, the percentage of students who achieve passing scores by the end of grade 12, often after retesting multiple times. Also, only about half of the states that offer alternative paths to graduation provided information on the percentage of students who complete high school using these alternative paths. This information is vital to understanding the true impact of these exams.
- ▶ **As they put in place end-of-course exams, states should directly and openly address the need for greater rigor in the content of their exams and for greater coordination of high school requirements with college preparedness and work readiness demands.** Many state officials reported that they are moving toward end-of-course exams as a way to better align what is tested with what is taught and to improve the academic rigor of the curriculum. A few also expressed hope that these new exams would help to prepare students better for college or work. But simply changing the type of exam is unlikely to achieve all of these goals unless accompanied by steps to address the issues of rigor and coordination with college and work.

## Study Methods

The Center on Education Policy used the following methods to identify issues and collect information for this year's study. In particular we:

- Conducted a detailed survey of states with current or planned high school exit exams
- Conducted phone interviews of state and district officials and experts regarding the move toward end-of-course exams
- Reviewed our own work on exit exams conducted over the past six years
- Reviewed major research conducted by others on exit exams
- Kept abreast of important events related to exit exams

## State Survey Methods

As our primary research tool for this year's study, the Center on Education Policy designed and conducted a survey of state department of education officials, who were usually officials from the state's assessment division.

In January 2007, we contacted the chief state school officers of 26 states to request their state's participation in CEP's annual survey of states that have current or planned high school exit exam policies. We asked the chiefs to designate a person to work with us in developing the state profiles for this report. CEP staff partially filled in the survey, based on information we had collected and reported in 2007 and information gathered through our careful review of developments in state policies. In March 2008, we contacted these designated officials and asked them to verify, update, and add information to the survey forms for their state. All 26 states that met our criteria (see below) for having a state-mandated exit exam responded to our survey.

We used the states' survey responses to develop the state profiles included on the CD accompanying this report and posted on CEP's Web site ([www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org)). After developing the profiles, we sent a draft back to each state for review to ensure that we had accurately portrayed their testing systems. We also used state survey responses to tally the state exam characteristics, policies, and new developments that appear throughout the report.

Some states did not answer all of the survey questions, often simply because the data were not available or their policies were in flux. These policies may be in flux for several reasons. For example, state legislatures are under continuing and significant political pressure to moderate or ameliorate the effects of these exams. We also had several follow-up e-mails and phone calls with officials from each of the states to include the most accurate and up-to-date information we could in this report, but undoubtedly some statistics or policies will have changed soon after publication because events in this field move quickly.

## Methods for Phone Interviews for States Moving to End-of-Course Exams

CEP used a variety of methods to identify issues and collect information for Chapter 2, which explores the rationale behind the move toward end-of-course exams. In short, we:

- Conducted a review of current literature on end-of-course exams
- Analyzed CEP's local-level work on end-of-course exams conducted over the past six years in Maryland, Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, and Arizona
- Conducted in-depth interviews concerning end-of-course exams with stakeholders at the local, state, and national level, including 10 state education officials representing 6 states, 7 district administrators representing 5 states, and 2 national education experts.<sup>2</sup> Most of those interviewed have extensive experience in areas of assessment.

Many states offer some kind of end-of-course exam as part of their accountability and assessment system, and in several states, end-of-course exams are a requirement for graduating from high school. In some states, students have to obtain a passing score on these exams in order to graduate, while in others, students' scores are part of a graduation formula. For our interviews, we focused only on states that have or intend to implement mandatory end-of-course exams that students must pass in order to earn a high school diploma. We also focused on states that have moved from minimum-competency or comprehensive exams to end-of-course exams.

<sup>2</sup>Noticeably absent from those interviewed are teachers. While we recognize that in order to better understand the move toward end-of-course exams, gathering the perspectives of teachers is essential; we were unable to do so given the time frame and structure of the study. Therefore, the findings of this study should be considered with this limitation in mind.



Six states participated in this study. These include two states that have completely shifted to end-of-course exams (Mississippi and Tennessee), two that plan to implement dual testing systems (Massachusetts and South Carolina), and two that are in the process of replacing their current testing systems with end-of-course exams (New Jersey and Texas). During the interviews with state education officials, we asked them to identify district administrators with whom we could talk about end-of-course exams. Seven district administrators agreed to participate. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, analyzed for themes, and coded.

## Other Data Sources

CEP staff and consultants also conducted reviews of relevant studies that were either published or publicized during the past year. In addition, we tracked media coverage related to exit exams and searched state department of education Web sites for exit exam developments and information.

## Criteria for Including States in Our Survey

This study focuses on mandatory exit exams. Included in the study are states that meet the following criteria:

- States that require students to pass, not just take, state exit exams to receive a high school diploma, even if the students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grades
- States in which the exit exams are a state mandate rather than a local option—in other words, states that require students in all school districts to pass exit exams, rather than allowing districts to decide for themselves whether to make the exams a condition of graduation

We also include states that are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams that meet these two criteria. By phasing in, we mean that the state has a legislative or state board directive to have a test in place between 2008 and 2012; has already begun developing the tests; and is piloting the tests, although diplomas are not yet being withheld.

A note about terminology: This report often refers to an exit exam in the singular, but actually a state exit exam typically refers to an exam system consisting of multiple tests in different subjects, such as English language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies.

**Table 1** summarizes the major characteristics of exit exams in these 26 states.

State	Current Exam	Year Diplomas First Withheld Based on Current Exam	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Alabama	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition	2001	Reading, language, math, science, social studies	Comprehensive	11 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Editions
Alaska	Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)	2004	Reading, writing, math	Comprehensive	8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	None

*continues* ➤

State	Current Exam	Year Diplomas First Withheld Based on Current Exam	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Arizona	Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)	2006	Reading, writing, math	Comprehensive	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	None
Arkansas	Arkansas Comprehensive Assessment Program	2010	Literacy, algebra I and II, geometry, and biology	End-of-course	Literacy (11 <sup>th</sup> ), math and biology (varies)	Varies	None
California	California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)	2006	ELA, math	Comprehensive	ELA (through 10 <sup>th</sup> ), math (6 <sup>th</sup> - 7 <sup>th</sup> and algebra I)	10 <sup>th</sup>	None
Florida	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)	2003	Reading and math	Comprehensive	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	High School Competency Test (HSCT)
Georgia	Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT)	1994	ELA, writing, math, science, social studies	Comprehensive	9 <sup>th</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	Basic Skills Test
Idaho	Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)	2006	Reading, language usage, math, and science	Comprehensive	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	None
Indiana	End-of-Course Assessments (ECAs) <sup>1</sup>	2000	ELA, mathematics	Comprehensive	9 <sup>th</sup> , including pre-algebra and algebra I	10 <sup>th</sup>	Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE)
Louisiana	Graduation Exit Examination (GEE)	2003	ELA, math, science, social studies	Comprehensive	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	Graduation Exit Exam
Maryland	Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)	2009	English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, government	End-of-course	10 <sup>th</sup>	Varies	Maryland Functional Tests
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)	2003	ELA, math, science (2010), U.S. history (2012)	Comprehensive plus end-of-course exams in science (2010) and U.S. history (2012)	10 <sup>th</sup> /high school standards	10 <sup>th</sup> ; science and U.S. history will vary	None

State	Current Exam	Year Diplomas First Withheld Based on Current Exam	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Minnesota	Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) <sup>1</sup>	2010	Reading, writing, math	Comprehensive	High School Standards	Writing in 9 <sup>th</sup> ; reading in 10 <sup>th</sup> ; math in 11 <sup>th</sup>	Basic Skills Test (BST)
Mississippi	Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)	2006	English II (with writing component), algebra I, Biology I, U.S. history from 1877	End-of-course	Aligned to course content	Varies	Functional Literacy Examination (FLE)
Nevada	High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)	2003	Reading, writing, math, science (2008)	Comprehensive	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> , writing in 11 <sup>th</sup>	High School Proficiency Examination (earlier version based on 1994 curriculum)
New Jersey	High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)	2003	Language arts literacy, math; end-of-course exam in biology (2010)	Comprehensive plus one end-of-course in biology (2010)	11 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup> ; biology will vary	High School Proficiency Test <sup>-11</sup>
New Mexico	New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) <sup>1</sup>	1990	Reading, language arts, written composition, math, science, social studies	Minimum competency	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)
New York	Regents Examinations	2000	ELA, math, science, global history and geography, U.S. history and government	End-of-course	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	Varies	Regents Competency Tests
North Carolina	North Carolina Competency Tests and Tests of Computer Skills <sup>1</sup>	1982 (math/reading) 2001 (computer skills) 2010 (end-of-course exams)	Reading comprehension, math, computer skills; starting 2010, end-of-course exams in algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, biology	Comprehensive In 2010, five end-of-course exams	8 <sup>th</sup> ; end-of-course exams (course-specific)	8 <sup>th</sup> ; end-of-course exams will vary	North Carolina Competency Tests and Tests of Computer Skills

continues ►

State	Current Exam	Year Diplomas First Withheld Based on Current Exam	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Ohio	Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT)	2007	Reading, writing, math, science, social studies	Comprehensive	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Proficiency Tests
Oklahoma	Oklahoma End-of-Instruction (EOI) Exams	2012	English II, English III, algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology I, U.S. history	End-of-course	High school standards	Varies	None
South Carolina	High School Assessment Program (HSAP)	2006	ELA, math, science (2010)	Comprehensive plus end-of-course exams in science (2010)	Through 10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> ; end-of-course exam will vary	Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP)
Tennessee	Gateway Examinations	2005	English I, II, and III, Algebra I and II, geometry, biology I, chemistry, U.S. history, physics (2013)	End-of-course	10 <sup>th</sup>	Varies	Tennessee Competency Test
Texas	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) <sup>a</sup>	2005	ELA (reading/writing), math, science, social studies	Comprehensive	Aligned to course content	11 <sup>th</sup>	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)
Virginia	Standards of Learning (SOL)	2004	English (reading/writing), algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to present, Virginia and U.S. history, world geography	End-of-course	Aligned to course content	Varies	Literacy Passport Test
Washington	Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	2008	Reading, writing, math (2013), science (2013)	Comprehensive plus end-of-course exams	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	None

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Table reads: Alabama currently administers the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, for which consequences began for the class of 2001. The exam assesses reading, language, math, science, and social studies, and is considered by the state to be a comprehensive, standards-based exam aligned to 11<sup>th</sup> grade standards. The current test replaced the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Editions.

<sup>1</sup> Indiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Texas will transition to new exams. See state profiles, found in the accompanying CD or online, for detailed information.

Note: This year's report uses the term "comprehensive" to refer to exit exams aligned to state standards in several subject areas and generally targeted to the 9<sup>th</sup>- or 10<sup>th</sup>-grade level. Previous CEP reports referred to these as "standards-based" exams.

Note: ELA = English language arts.

Source: Center on Education Policy, *exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2008*.





# Chapter 1: New Developments

## Introduction

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) has been tracking the development and implementation of state-mandated high school exit exams over the past seven years. This chapter outlines new developments CEP has identified since the release of our 2007 report on exit exams. In the past year, there were no further additions to our list of states with state-mandated high school exit exams. Consequently, there continue to be 26 states that currently have or plan to implement high school exit exam policies. More states report plans to move to end-of-course exams. These tests are usually standards-based and assess mastery of specific course content. In 2002, there were only two states using this type of exam. By 2015 there will be 14 states using such exams, including three states that plan to implement dual testing systems—a combination of a comprehensive assessment and end-of-course exams.

Arizona continues to face lawsuits challenging its exit exam policy, and has reinstated the augmentation formula, an alternative path to the state's exit exam requirement. Meanwhile, New Jersey and Maryland work to strengthen and further develop alternative paths to graduation. And although states continue to move forward with implementation of exit exam policies, they are challenged by a number of reports that question the effect of the exams and, in the case of California, suggest higher dropout rates in 12<sup>th</sup> grade that are correlated with the implementation of the state's high school exit exam policy.

## Key Findings

- ▶ State officials in Washington are enforcing consequences based on students' performance on the state-mandated Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exit exam. Despite delays in the mathematics and science requirements, high school seniors in the class of 2008 were the first required to pass the reading and writing sections of the WASL in order to receive their high school diploma. As of the end of the 2007-08 school year, a total of 23 states require students to take and pass high school exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma.
- ▶ The great majority of students, especially students of color, are affected by exit exam policies. The 23 states currently implementing these policies have 68% of the total number of students enrolled in the nation's public high schools, and 74% of the enrollment of students of color. By 2012, when Arkansas, Maryland, and Oklahoma begin to implement their exit exam policies, these percentages will grow to 75% of all student enrollment and 84% of students of color.

- Another three states (Connecticut, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) have considered adopting high school exit exam policies. In the face of opposition, Oregon and Pennsylvania state officials have opted to allow the use of alternative assessments. Facing similar opposition, other states (Arizona, Maryland, and New Jersey) work to develop and refine alternative paths to graduation.
- End-of-course exams are growing in popularity among the states, and minimum-competency exams are being phased out. In 2002, only two states had end-of-course exams, while ten states had minimum-competency exams. In 2008, four states had end-of-course exams, and only two had minimum-competency exams. During each of those years, comprehensive exams were the other type of exams used. By 2015 there will be 14 states with end-of-course exams, and none with minimum-competency exams.
- Most states (18 out of 23) that currently implement high school exit exam policies report having alternative paths to graduation for general education students. But some experts argue that these alternative paths, which often consist of options such as replacing exit exam requirements with passing scores on Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, are unlikely to benefit a large number of students.

## Number of States with Mandatory Exit Exams Stays the Same

The number of states that have implemented or plan to implement mandatory exit exams has reached a standstill. Although three additional states (Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Oregon) have considered implementing high school assessments, state officials in Pennsylvania and Oregon opted to allow the use of alternative assessments, and state officials in Connecticut did not reach any final decision in the past year. Consequently, there are still a total of 26 states that currently withhold or plan to withhold high school diplomas based on students' performance on state-mandated exams. In 2008, 23 states required students enrolled in public high schools to achieve passing scores on state-mandated high school exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma. This includes Washington, where state officials began to enforce the exit exam requirement in 2008. An additional 3 states (Arkansas, Maryland, and Oklahoma) will begin withholding diplomas based on students' performance on these exams within the next few years. By 2012, a total of 26 states will withhold diplomas based on students' performance on exit exams.

There are 6 states that require students to take, but not pass, college entrance exams and work readiness tests to graduate from high school. **Box 1** briefly summarizes the use of ACT and SAT exams in these states.

### Total Number of States and Students Affected

**Figure 1** displays the 23 states that, as of school year 2007-08, require students to pass exams to receive a high school diploma, 5 more states than in 2002 (CEP, 2002).

By 2012, an additional three states will withhold diplomas based on students' exam performance. Maryland stopped using the Maryland Functional Test as its exit exam in 2004 (CEP, 2004), but will resume withholding diplomas in 2009, when students will be required to pass the Maryland High School Assessment to graduate. Arkansas will begin withholding diplomas with the class of 2010, and Oklahoma will begin withholding diplomas for the first time with the class of 2012.

In the 2007-08 school year, 68% of the nation's high school students and 75% of the nation's minority high school students were enrolled in public school in the 23 states with exit exams (see **table 2**). By 2012, an estimated 74% of high school students in the nation and 84% of minority high school students will be enrolled in public school in the 26 states with planned exit exams.



Six states currently require high school students to take either the ACT or SAT examination before completing high school, but do not require that students achieve specific scores in order to receive their high school diploma. In other words, students must take the exams, but are not required to pass the exams. Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, and Wyoming require students to take the ACT, and Maine requires the SAT. States are incorporating this requirement as part of an overall effort to improve student readiness for college and to provide students with incentives to attend postsecondary institutions. Two states, Michigan and Wyoming, administer WorkKeys assessments. These assessments, developed by ACT, measure workplace readiness across a variety of applied and personal skill sets, such as applied mathematics, reading for information, listening, and teamwork.

Three states are using the SAT or ACT to meet some of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Maine replaced its previous high school examination with the SAT and uses it to meet the high school math and English assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. In Michigan and Illinois, the ACT is used to meet part of the assessment requirements of NCLB; however, neither state uses the ACT as the sole examination for this requirement. For example, Illinois' Prairie State Achievement Examination includes not only the ACT, but also a Harcourt-developed science test and two WorkKeys assessments to fulfill the high school testing requirement.

High school students in Colorado, Kentucky, and Wyoming are required to take the ACT. However, exam scores are not used for NCLB accountability purposes. The requirement is intended to encourage more students to apply to college and provide additional information about college readiness to teachers and administrators. Wyoming uses the results to qualify students for a scholarship program.

### Washington Begins Implementation of Exit Exams

CEP has been tracking the state of Washington's progress toward implementing the state-mandated Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) since our first report on exit exams in 2002. At that time state representatives reported that the exam, which was administered for the first time on a voluntary basis in 1999 and statewide in 2001, assessed students in English language arts and mathematics (CEP, 2002). On CEP's survey for the 2004 annual report on exit exams, state representatives from Washington reported the state's intention of adding a writing and science component to the assessment (CEP, 2004). The science assessment would become a graduation requirement for the class of 2010. However, in May 2007, the governor signed a bill postponing the requirement for students to pass the mathematics and the science sections of the WASL. The two subjects will now be a requirement starting with the class of 2013. Even so, state officials moved forward to enforce consequences, and students in the class of 2008 were the first required to achieve passing scores on the reading and writing sections of the WASL in order to receive a high school diploma.

### More States Consider Implementing Exit Exams

State officials in three states (Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Oregon) are considering proposals to reform their high schools. All three states have considered proposals that involve state-required high school assessments. These states continue to refine proposed policies as they conduct studies and consider other or multiple assessments.

#### Connecticut

For over a year, some state education officials in Connecticut have tried to persuade state policymakers to implement a state-mandated high school exit exam. Several proposals were presented, and finally in December 2007, the state board of education endorsed a high school redesign proposal (Becker, 2007). In

**Figure 1 States with Mandatory Exit Exams**

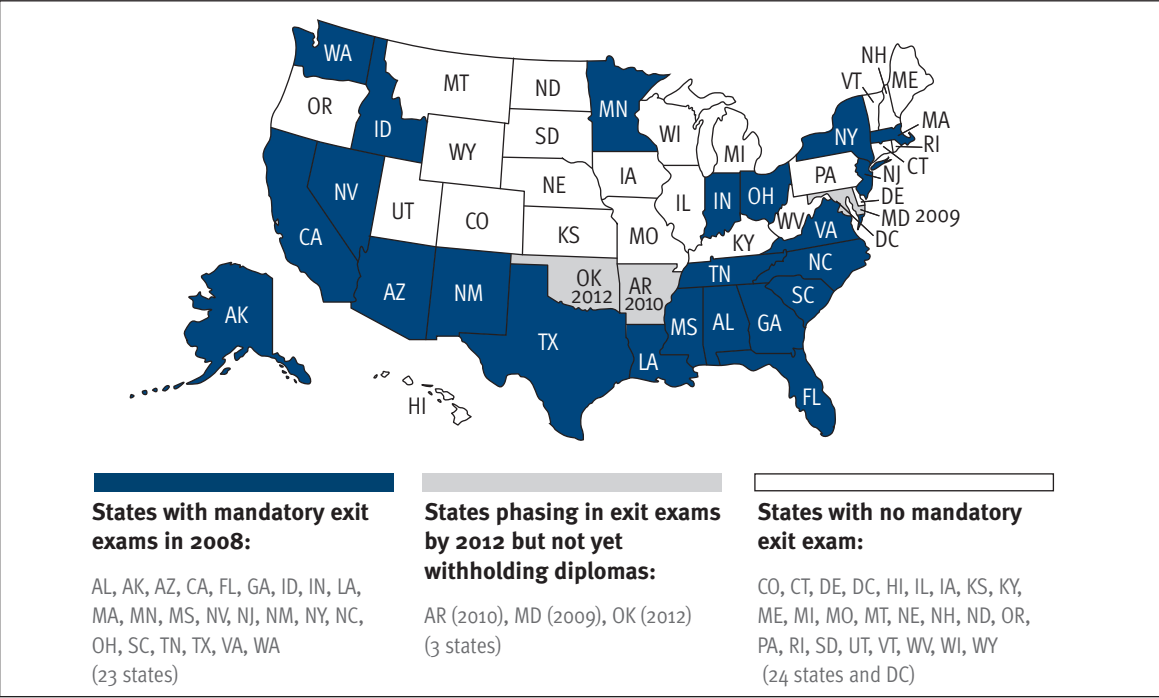


Figure reads: Alabama has a mandatory exit exam and is withholding diplomas from students based on exam performance. Maryland is phasing in a new mandatory exit exam and plans to begin withholding diplomas based on this exam in 2009. Colorado does not have an exit exam, nor does it plan to implement one.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2008.

**Table 2 Percentage of Public High School Students Enrolled in States with Exit Exams**

Student Group	2008 (23 states)	2012 Projected (26 states)
All students	68%	74%
White	62%	66%
Latino	79%	88%
African American	72%	80%
Asian/Pacific Islander	76%	81%
American Indian/Native Alaskan	59%	80%
All minority students (Latino, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native Alaskan)	75%	84%

Table reads: In 2008, 72% of the nation’s African American public school students in grades 9-12 were enrolled in school in states with exit exams; in 2012, 80% of African American public school students in grades 9-12 will be enrolled in school in states with exit exams.

Source: Calculations by the Center on Education Policy, based on data from Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2008.

early January 2008, the department released a news report announcing that Commissioner Mark McQuillan would host a “Listening Tour” in which he would share details of the proposal with educators, parents, students, and business and community leaders and hear their comments.

The proposal, which takes into account recommendations from the state board of Education’s Ad Hoc Committee on Secondary School Reform, suggests that new graduation requirements include state-administered end-of-course exams. It also suggests an increase in required credits, a set of required courses, locally administered end-of-course performance tasks, student success plans with career path options, a senior project, and embedding learning skills such as communication and teamwork skills into the curriculum. If approved, these new requirements would be enforced starting with the graduating class of 2015.

It was also reported that, in the 2008 general assembly, the state board will request funds to conduct a feasibility study to determine the cost—both to the state and to local regional school districts—for the new graduation requirements. It is anticipated that the state board will present its recommendations to the general assembly in its 2009 session (CDE, 2008).

### **Pennsylvania**

In 2006, the Governor’s Commission on College and Career Success called for Pennsylvania to set statewide graduation requirements in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. The commission endorsed the use of state-developed, end-of-course assessments in core academic subjects. In January 2008, the state board of education responded to the commission’s recommendation by proposing the following changes to existing graduation requirements, beginning with the graduating class of 2014.

For reading, writing, math, science, and social studies, students will be able to demonstrate proficiency by:

- Passing the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)
- Passing an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam
- Passing new Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs), or
- Passing a local assessment that independent evaluators certify is equivalent to the state GCAs

The GCAs will be developed according to the Pennsylvania standards, as follows:

- Mathematics content traditionally taught in Algebra I, Algebra II, and geometry courses
- Reading, writing, speaking and listening content traditionally included in high school literature and composition courses
- History, civics and government content traditionally included in high-school level American history, World history, and civics and government courses
- Science, technology, environment and ecology content traditionally taught in high-school level biology and chemistry courses

These changes were recommended unanimously by the state board of education. In early July 2008, Governor Ed Rendell’s administration and state lawmakers agreed to make the subject-specific final exams optional for now. The exams will be available for school districts to use on a voluntary basis beginning in the 2009-10 school year (Associated Press, 2008). Currently, Pennsylvania does not meet CEP’s criteria for a state with mandated exit exams.

## Oregon

Last year, the state board voted to expand graduation requirements and have students demonstrate proficiency in math, reading, writing, and speaking to ensure students are better prepared for work and college. The Oregon Statewide Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS), which assesses reading, math, and writing, was proposed by the state board as the assessment to measure proficiency. However, board members opted to not have the OAKS as the only path to a high school diploma. Instead, they are supportive of a proposal described as “multiple pathways and options.” Under this proposal, students would be required to demonstrate proficiency in math, reading, writing, and speaking by:

- Achieving a state-determined score on the OAKS,
- Achieving a state-determined score on an approved test (i.e., SAT, ACT, PSAT, PLAN, Advanced Placement, or other), or
- Completing an approved, locally scored assessment (i.e., work sample or student project)

The state will enforce the new requirements starting with the graduating class of 2012. After a public hearing held on May 28, 2008, the state board made a final decision in favor of this approach on June 19, 2008 (ODE, 2008).

## More States Move Toward End-of-Course Exams

CEP groups the types of state tests into three categories based on the states’ own descriptions of their tests:

- **Minimum-competency exams**, which generally focus on basic skills below the high school level
- **Comprehensive exams**, which are aligned with state standards in several subject areas and are generally targeted at the 9<sup>th</sup>- or 10<sup>th</sup>-grade level
- **End-of-course exams**, which assess whether students have mastered the content of specific high school courses; these exams are usually standards-based, and students take each test after completing a specific course.

In past reports, CEP referred to the comprehensive exam as the “standards-based exam.” However, with a number of states moving toward end-of-course exams, which also tend to be standards-based, we find that relabeling these exams as the “comprehensive” exams more accurately distinguishes the two types of exams. That is, comprehensive exams tend to be longer, assess multiple subjects according to each state’s requirements, and are taken by all students in a specific grade (typically 10<sup>th</sup>). End-of-course exams assess mastery of specific courses and are administered to students as they complete each specific course.

Over the past few years, CEP has reported a gradual move away from minimum-competency exams and toward comprehensive and end-of-course exams. In the past two years, a growing number of state officials have reported intention or interest in moving toward end-of-course exams. Noting this strong pull toward end-of-course exams, CEP conducted interviews of state and district representatives in two states that have completely shifted to end-of-course exams, two states that plan to implement dual testing systems, and two states that are in the process of replacing their current testing systems with end-of-course exams. The themes identified in these interviews are reported in Chapter 2 of this report. **Figure 2** illustrates the shift to end-of-course exams, and **table 3** summarizes some of the upcoming changes.

By 2015, no state will be using minimum-competency exams, a shift from the 10 states that reported using these exams in 2002. Fifteen states will be using comprehensive exams, and fourteen will be using end-of-course exams (including three states that will be using a dual exam system).

**Figure 2** Types of Exit Exams States are Using or Plan to Use

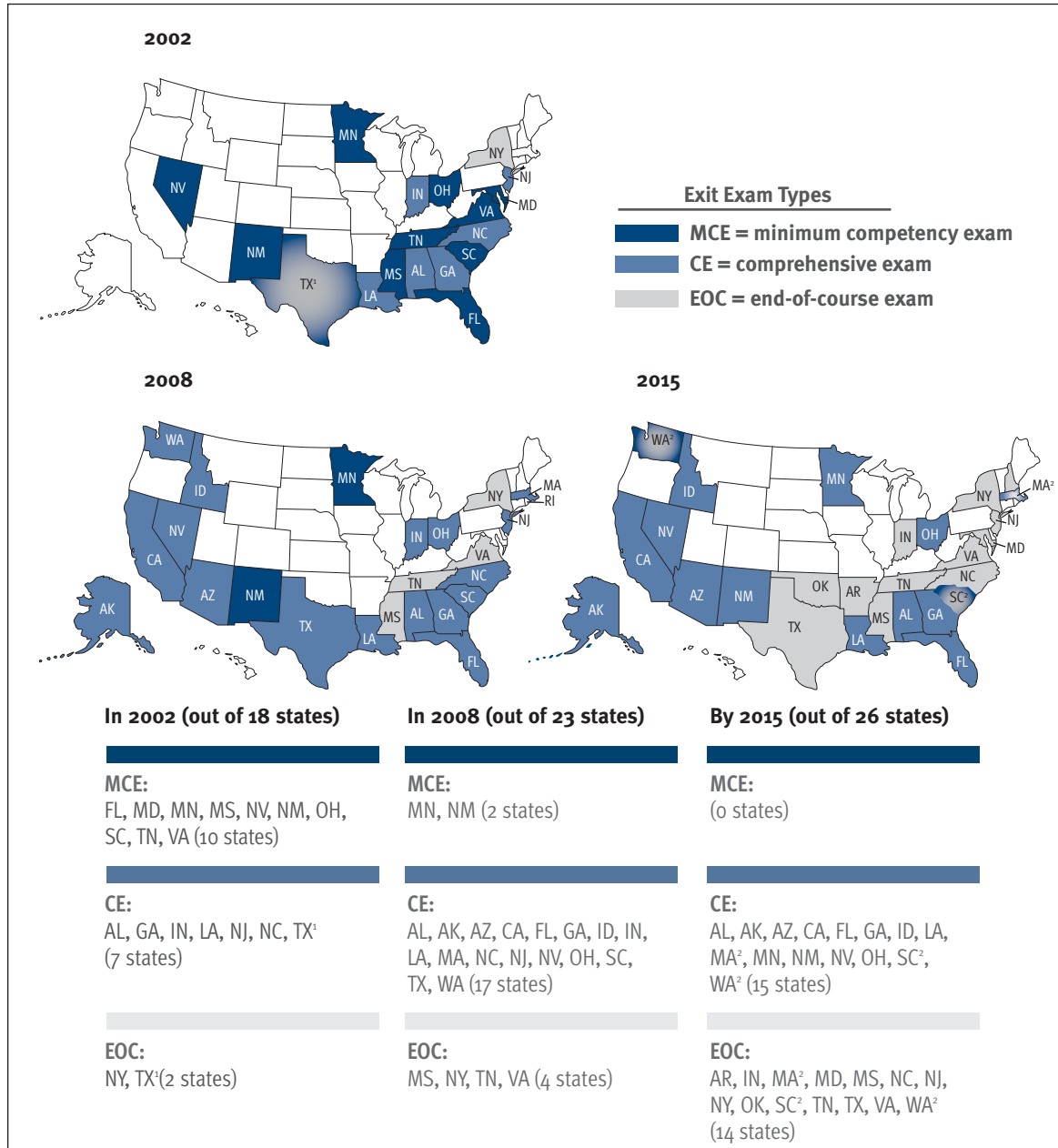


Figure reads: In 2002, 10 of the 18 states with fully implemented exit exams, including Florida, used minimum-competency exams, while 7 states, including Alabama, used comprehensive exams, and 2 states, including New York, used end-of-course exams. By 2015, none of the 26 states with mandatory exit exams will use minimum-competency exams, 15 will use comprehensive exams, and 14 will use end-of-course exams. Three states, including Massachusetts, will use a combination of comprehensive and end-of-course exams.

<sup>1</sup> In 2002, Texas gave students the option to pass either a CE or an EOC exam.

<sup>2</sup> By 2015, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Washington will require students to pass the comprehensive exams plus end-of-course exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2008.

Table 3

## Moving Toward End-of-Course Exams

Completely Moving to End-of-Course Exams	Dual Testing System Comprehensive + End-of-Course Exams	Considering End-of-Course Exams
<p>States are in the process of abandoning minimum-competency and comprehensive exams to replace them with end-of-course exams in the following courses:</p> <p><b>Indiana:</b> Algebra I and English 10 (2012)</p> <p><b>Maryland:</b> English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government (2009)</p> <p><b>New Jersey:</b> Biology (2010), and eventually Algebra II, language arts literacy, geometry, and chemistry</p> <p><b>North Carolina:</b> Algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, and biology (2010)</p> <p><b>Texas:</b> Three end-of-course assessments in four core subjects (2015)</p>	<p>In addition to their comprehensive exams, these states will add end-of-course exams in some courses:</p> <p><b>Massachusetts:</b> One of four science content areas (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, technology/engineering) (2010), U.S. history (2012)</p> <p><b>South Carolina:</b> Biology (2010)</p> <p><b>Washington:</b> Algebra I and geometry (2014)</p>	<p>Officials in the following states are working on various proposals that may include end-of-course exams:</p> <p><b>Alabama:</b> Proposing new diploma with requirement of passing three out of five subject-area tests.</p> <p><b>Georgia:</b> Department of Education working on a proposal to phase out the current comprehensive assessment and replace it with a series of end-of-course tests.</p> <p><b>Louisiana:</b> State officials considering replacing the Graduation Exit Exam with eight end-of-course exams.</p> <p><b>New Mexico:</b> Current minimum-competency exam scheduled to terminate July 1, 2010; EOC exams are under consideration for the new graduation requirements.</p> <p><b>Connecticut:</b> State studying end-of-course exams that might be used if state officials choose to implement exit exams policy.</p>

Table reads: Indiana will replace its current comprehensive exams with end-of-course exams beginning with students graduating in 2012. South Carolina will add an end-of-course exam in biology in addition to its current comprehensive exam, starting with the class of 2010. In Louisiana, state officials have discussed replacing the Graduation Exit Exam with eight end-of-course exams, but a final decision has not been made.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2008.

### Five States Completely Moving to End-of-Course Exams

At the time CEP published its 2007 annual report on state-mandated high school exit exams, state officials in only one new state, Texas, had officially reported their intention of replacing their current exam with end-of-course exams (CEP, 2007a). This year, state officials from three additional states (Indiana, New Jersey, and North Carolina) have officially reported their intention to replace their current assessment with end-of-course exams. These states are in addition to Maryland, which over the past few years has been in the process of transitioning to end-of-course exams.

## Indiana

Indiana has been administering the Graduation Qualifying Examination (GQE) since 1997 and began withholding diplomas based on students' performance on this exam with the graduating class of 2000. The GQE assesses English language arts through grade 9 and mathematics through pre-algebra and Algebra I.

On October 5, 2007, the governor of Indiana and the superintendent of public instruction announced that the GQE will be phased out and will be replaced by the End-of-Course Assessments (ECAs). Students in grade 9 in the 2007-08 school year (the graduating class of 2011), will be the last cohort required to achieve passing scores on the GQE. Students in grade 9 in the 2008-09 school year (the graduating class of 2012), will be the first required to achieve passing scores on the ECAs for Algebra I and English 10. Students will take the ECAs at the completion of each course. These exams are already available.

## New Jersey

New Jersey has undergone a number of changes in the tests it requires students to pass to receive a high school diploma. The state began with the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT<sub>11</sub>), which was first administered in 1983 and became a state graduation requirement for all public high school students who graduated with the class of 1994. The class of 2000 was the last required to pass the HSPT<sub>11</sub>. The High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), which assesses language arts literacy and mathematics, was first administered to 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students in 2002 and became a graduation requirement for students in the graduating class of 2003. The HSPA included a science assessment that was supposed to become a graduation requirement starting with the class of 2007. The science section of the HSPA, however, was never used as a graduation requirement and was replaced by a biology end-of-course exam in 2008.

The New Jersey DOE announced that it plans to replace the HSPA with end-of-course exams for all content areas. The biology test is the first step in this direction. The state department of education piloted end-of-course exams in Algebra II in May 2008 on a volunteer basis. Other end-of-course assessments are planned for language arts literacy, geometry, and chemistry.

## North Carolina

North Carolina has been administering the North Carolina Competency Tests in reading comprehension and mathematics since the 1978-79 school year and began withholding diplomas based on students' performance on these exams with the graduating class of 1982.

In CEP's 2007 survey, state representatives reported that students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2006-07 (the graduating class of 2010) would be required to pass end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, and biology, *in addition* to the competency tests in reading and mathematics (CEP, 2007a). In our 2008 survey, however, state representatives reported that the old reading and mathematics tests are graduation requirements for students who entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade before 2006-07. These tests are being phased out. Now, students who entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2006-07 and are following the college/university preparation, college/technical preparation, and career preparation courses of study will be held to new exit standards, which include passing the five end-of-course tests and completing a graduation project. In other words, students in the graduating class of 2009 will be the last cohort required to achieve passing scores on the North Carolina Competency Tests in reading and mathematics. Students in the graduating class of 2010 will be the first required to achieve passing scores on the five end-of-course exams, which will be administered at the completion of each course.



## Three States Will Implement a Dual Testing System

In 2013, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Washington will require public high school students to pass a comprehensive assessment plus new end-of-course exams in order to receive a high school diploma. Last year, four states (Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina) were reported in this category. This year, New Jersey and North Carolina have moved to the group of states in which state officials plan to completely abandon the comprehensive exams and replace them with end-of-course exams.

State officials in Massachusetts and South Carolina continue their plans to implement dual testing systems. In Massachusetts, students will be required to pass, in addition to the comprehensive exam, an end-of-course exam in one of four science classes: biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering, starting with the class of 2010; and an additional end-of-course (or end-of-series) exam in U.S. history starting with the class of 2012. In South Carolina, students will have to pass end-of-course exams in science and U.S. history in addition to passing the state's comprehensive high school exit exam that assesses English language arts and mathematics. Washington is the only new state in which state officials plan to implement a dual testing system.

### Washington

As reported earlier in this chapter, state officials in Washington moved forward in withholding diplomas from students who fail to pass the reading and writing WASL, starting with public high school students in the class of 2008. The state was scheduled to enforce the requirement of passing the reading, writing, and math WASL in 2008. However, in May 2007, a bill passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor postponed the requirement for passing the mathematics WASL for the class of 2008 and the science WASL for the class of 2010 to the class of 2013. At that time, the legislature and the governor asked the state board of education to research the use of end-of-course exams to augment or replace the WASL. In March 2008, state lawmakers and Governor Chris Gregoire voted to replace the WASL math test with end-of-course exams in Algebra I and geometry starting with students graduating in 2014.

As it currently stands, students in the class of 2013 remain the first cohort to be required to achieve passing scores on a mathematics test, but they will have the option of taking the comprehensive WASL math assessment or the two end-of-course exams. Students in the class of 2014 will be the first cohort required to achieve passing scores on the WASL reading, writing, and science assessments, and on the Algebra I and geometry end-of-course exams.

## Six Additional States Consider End-of-Course Exams

As more and more states make the move to end-of-course exams, a growing number of other states are considering similar actions. Of the states that currently require comprehensive assessments as their state-mandated high school exit exams, three (Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana) are considering abandoning their current assessments and replacing them with end-of-course exams. State officials in New Mexico are considering end-of-course exams, among other forms of assessment, to replace the current minimum-competency exam they have opted to phase out.

Additionally, state officials in Connecticut are considering implementing state-mandated high school exit exams. If state officials choose to require exit exams, they are likely to use end-of-course exams. On June 30, 2008, Governor Charlie Crist of Florida signed a bill that authorizes, but does not mandate, the creation of end-of-course exams. And in July 2008, Governor Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania signed a bill that allocated funds for the development of subject-specific end-of-course exams that districts may use on a voluntary basis for now. CEP will continue to monitor the progress in these states.



## Alabama

Alabama currently administers the Alabama High School Graduation Examination, 3rd Edition. This is a comprehensive exam aligned to 11<sup>th</sup> grade and is administered to all students for the first time in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. State officials are considering a new requirement of passing three out of five subject-area tests (reading, mathematics, and a choice of science, language, or social studies).

## Georgia

Public high school students in Georgia are currently required to pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests and the Georgia High School Writing Test. These are comprehensive exams aligned to grades 9-11 and are administered to all students for the first time in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The state department of education is working on a proposal to phase out the GHSGT and replace it with a series of end-of-course assessments. This plan is still under development and a final decision has not been reached.

## Louisiana

In Louisiana, students are currently required to pass the Graduation Exit Examination. This is a comprehensive exam aligned to grades 9-12 and is administered for the first time to students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The state board has discussed replacing this exam with end-of-course tests, but there is no official policy at this time.

## New Mexico

The 2007 state legislative session terminated the current New Mexico High School Competency Exam effective July 1, 2010. This is a minimum-competency exam aligned to 8<sup>th</sup>-grade standards in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies and is administered for the first time to students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. New Mexico is the last of all states that previously administered minimum-competency exams to terminate this type of exam. Beginning with students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade in 2010-11 (the graduating class of 2012), students will be required to demonstrate competency in math, reading and language arts, science, and social studies based on new assessments. End-of-course exams are under consideration, but are not yet being developed.

## Legal Challenges to Exit Exams

In the past year, Arizona and California continued to struggle with legal challenges to their high school exit exam policies.

## Arizona

### Challenging the Constitutionality of the Exit Exam

The *Espinoza v. State of Arizona* lawsuit, which challenges the constitutionality of the state's exit exam requirement, was filed on April 8, 2006, on behalf of a group of students in the class of 2006 who had met all graduation requirements except passing the exam. The plaintiffs argue that the state inadequately funds education, thereby depriving many students of the services they need to reach state academic standards and pass Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). The suit mentions three specific groups of students harmed by the exit exam requirement: racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, and English language learners. This sort of litigation has delayed the implementation of exit exams in many other states.

On May 15, 2006, a superior court judge denied the request to suspend the exam for students in the class of 2006. The judge scheduled a hearing for July 2006. As of June 2008, the trial was still underway. According to a representative of the plaintiffs, the presiding judge for the case dismissed all claims with the exception of the claim pertaining to the provision of adequate funding for economically disadvantaged students. The plaintiffs may appeal the decision to dismiss the claims (E. Katz, William E. Morris Institute for Justice, personal communication).

### **Exit Exam Requirements for English Language Learners**

The *Flores v. Arizona* lawsuit was first brought against the state in 1992 by the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest. In 2000, the plaintiffs won the case, and a court ordered Arizona to improve funding for English language learners (Bland, 2005; CEP, 2006). But in July of 2005, with the threat of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) becoming a high school graduation requirement, the attorney in the original case asked a federal court to suspend the requirement for ELL students until the state complied with an earlier court order to improve instruction for these students.

The lawsuit continues to challenge the state of Arizona. In March 2007, the court once again ruled that the legislature's attempt to meet the education needs of English language learners falls short of adequate. The judge ordered the legislature to comply by the end of the legislative session, but the session ended without a resolution to this issue. In October 2007, the judge found the state in violation of the March 2007 order of the court, and the state was ordered to appropriate funds for programs aimed to help ELL students achieve proficiency in English. In December 2007, the state legislature and Superintendent Horne went before the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals to argue that the judge was illegally ordering them to spend more money for ELL students.

In February 2008, the United States 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit upheld the judge's ruling and ordered the State of Arizona to comply by March 4, 2008. That month the judge accepted arguments by the attorneys for the Republican legislative leaders who stated they could not meet the March 4 deadline for funding. The judge gave them until April 15, 2008. Each day after April 15 would cost the state \$2 million in fines, and after May 15, 2008, the daily fines would go up to \$5 million (AEA, 2008). However, according to a representative of the plaintiffs, in April the Arizona legislature approved a \$40.6 million appropriation for the implementation of a model for funding the ELL program. The plaintiffs responded by filing a motion of relief, citing that the funds earmarked by the legislature were not adequate and that the funding did not target the places where it was most needed. As of June 2008, briefings for these claims were in progress (T. Hogan, Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest, personal communication).

## **California**

### **Lawsuit Challenges Fairness of State Exit Exam**

On July 18, 2007, a tentative settlement agreement was reached in the longstanding *Valenzuela v. O'Connell* lawsuit challenging the fairness of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The lawsuit was filed on February 8, 2006, by a San Francisco law firm and contends that the exam unfairly penalizes students who have not received adequate learning resources. The settlement agreement, which is outlined in Assembly Bill (AB) 347, leaves the exit exam in place, stating that students who complete grade 12 without achieving a passing score on both parts of the CAHSEE may receive two additional years of academic assistance in the material tested on the exam at no charge to them.

The bill requires school districts that receive state funds for intensive instruction to prepare students for the CAHSEE, to provide, among other things, the following services to students who complete grade 12 without achieving passing scores on both parts of the exam:

- Two consecutive years of additional instruction after completing grade 12 or until students pass both parts of the CAHSEE, whichever comes first
- Two consecutive years of intensive instruction to improve English proficiency for English language learners after completing grade 12 or until students pass both parts of the CAHSEE, whichever comes first
- Notification and counseling to students about the availability of instruction and services, and of their right to file a complaint if they are not provided these services

The bill also outlines district reporting and monitoring requirements designed to document the support provided to students who have not passed the CAHSEE.

The agreement received approval on July 19, 2007, by Alameda Superior Court Judge Robert Freedman and was passed by the legislature and signed by the governor on October 12, 2007.

## Some New Developments on Alternative Paths to Graduation

All states with mandated high school exit exams offer alternative paths to graduation. States vary in the types of alternative paths they allow. Some examples include alternative exams, substitute exams (i.e. ACT/SAT), waivers, multiple indicators of mastery, etc. Although some states offer alternative paths that lead to a regular high school diploma, some alternative paths lead to certificates of completion, certificates of attendance, special diplomas or the like.

As displayed in **table 4**, all 23 states that currently withhold diplomas based on students' performance on mandated high school exit exams have alternative measures for students with disabilities, and 18 of the 23 states have them for general education students. Only 3 of the 23 states have alternative measures specifically for English language learners, but ELL students in all states can use the alternative measures available to general education students. Only about half of the states that offer alternative paths were able to provide information on the percentage or number of students who completed high school in 2007 using alternative measures. Detailed information on each of the states can be found in the individual state profiles in the CD accompanying this report.

Alternative paths may play a major roll for students with disabilities and English language learners in some states. In Mississippi, for example, 61.2% of students with disabilities in the class of 2007 received a certificate of completion or an occupational diploma, which do not require that students pass the state's high school exit exam. In the same year in Florida, approximately 20% of English language learners satisfied the graduation requirement through an alternative assessment (ACT/SAT). Of the 9,762 students who received certificates of completion, approximately 25% were English language learners. And, an additional 3% of ELL students received a State of Florida diploma by passing the GED. Such large percentages of students completing high school through alternative measures are not the norm.

Some experts argue that, with a few exceptions, alternative measures affect a very small percentage of students overall. For example, a common form of substitute assessment allows students to use passing scores on Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams in place of the state's exit exam, but the number of students who fail the state exam and pass AP or IB exams is minuscule. In fact, for general education students, states that were able to provide information on the percentage of students graduating through alternative paths reported percentages in the single digits. Some reported that less than 1% of general education students completed high school through alternative paths in 2007. However, the true impact of these alternatives is hard to capture on a state survey, especially because almost half of the states that offer alternative paths do not collect this data at the state level.

**Table 4** Alternative Paths to Graduation, 2007

State	General Education Students	Students with Disabilities	English Language Learners
Alabama		✓*	
Alaska		✓*	
Arizona	✓	✓	
California		✓	
Florida	✓*	✓*	*
Georgia	✓*	✓	
Idaho	✓	✓	✓
Indiana	✓*	✓*	*
Louisiana		✓*	
Massachusetts	✓*	✓*	*
Minnesota	✓	✓	✓
Mississippi	✓	✓*	*
Nevada	✓*	✓*	
New Jersey	✓*	✓*	✓*
New Mexico	✓	✓	
New York	✓	✓	
North Carolina	✓	✓*	
Ohio	✓*	✓*	*
South Carolina	✓*	✓	
Tennessee	✓*	✓*	
Texas		✓	
Virginia	✓*	✓*	
Washington	✓	✓	
	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>

Table reads: For students graduating in 2007, the state of Arizona offered alternative paths to graduation for general education students and for students with disabilities, but it did not offer alternative paths specifically for English language learners. State representatives did not provide CEP with information on the percentage or the number of students who completed high school through alternative paths.

\* These states were able to provide information on the percentage or number of students who completed high school through alternative paths. Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi and Ohio do not offer alternative paths specifically for English language learners. However, they were able to report information on the number or percentage of English language learners who graduate using alternative paths available to general education students.

Note: Information in this table represents alternative paths to graduation. This does not necessarily mean alternative paths to a regular high school diploma.

Note: State officials in Arkansas, Maryland, and Oklahoma are still considering alternative paths to graduation. Because these states have not begun to withhold diplomas based on students' performance on state-mandated high school exit exams, they did not report percentages or numbers of students who completed high school through alternative paths in 2007. These states were excluded from this table to facilitate the display of information from other states.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2008.

One of our expert reviewers argues that the variance in exit exam requirements plus the varying alternative paths across states illustrates our nation's lack of understanding of what a high school diploma represents in terms of knowledge and skill. He explained:

*A high school diploma is becoming ever less comparable among states. Years ago, all diplomas represented a number of credits completed and perhaps completion of a minimum competency exam. There was no pretense that a diploma was a measure of knowledge and skill. Now, states are trying to assert that a diploma should be a measure of something, but what exactly varies dramatically. This would be fine if students did not exist in a national economy (let alone a global economy) but, alas, they do.*

Furthermore, he asks, "Why not prepare all students for the AP/IB and then allow some lower score on those exams to count?" After all, he explained, "There is no pretense that the state exit exams and the AP/IB are in any way comparable. They are simply measures that legislators deem rigorous. The alternatives," he concluded, "aren't really going to get states off the hook as far as getting many more kids to pass the exam requirement."

## Developments in Alternatives for General Education Students

The following section briefly summarizes some of the most notable recent developments in alternative assessments for general education students.

### Alabama

In May 2008, the board of education approved a proposal that both increased graduation requirements and relaxed exit exam requirements for high school seniors. The proposal creates two high school tracks—the Advanced Academic Endorsement and the Credit Based Endorsement.

In prior years, high school students had to "opt-in" to receive an Advanced Academic Endorsement, and about 39% of students did so. This advanced track requires four credits in English, four in social studies, four in science, four in mathematics (including Algebra II with trigonometry), 2.5 credits in P.E., health, arts, and computer, two credits in foreign language, and 3.5 in electives. Plus it requires that students pass all five end-of-course exams that make up the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE).

The Credit Based Endorsement requires the same course work minus the specific math and the foreign language requirement. Students on this track will only be required to pass three of the five end-of-course exams in reading, mathematics, and choice of science, language, or social studies. After approval from the board, now all students will be automatically enrolled in the advanced track and will have the choice to "opt-out" of it with parent consent (ALSDE, 2008; Stock, 2008).

### Arizona's Augmentation Formula

In 2005, a bill passed in Arizona that officially implemented the augmentation formula. The augmentation formula is an alternative path to graduation in Arizona. Through this formula high school students who failed one or more sections of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards could "augment" their scores with points derived from course grades of "C" or better. To qualify for this alternative, students would have to complete and pass all required courses, take the AIMS assessment each time the test was offered, and participate in remediation programs available at the student's school in the failed subject area(s). The policy was set to expire automatically on January 1, 2008. However, a large number of students were benefiting from augmentation and would have been denied a high school diploma without it. In the 2005-06 school year, 2,855 (almost 6%) and in the 2006-07 school year, 3,425 (again almost 6%) high school seniors met the graduation requirement by augmenting their scores with course grades (CEP, 2007b).

On May 13, 2008, a bill passed in the state Senate that would reinstitute augmentation (Scarpinato, 2008). On May 14, 2008, the House passed the augmentation bill, and the governor is expected to sign it. But the bill passed without sufficient votes to give it an emergency clause. This means that the bill will not take effect until 90 days after the legislature adjourns. In a memorandum from Superintendent Tom Horne, all schools were encouraged to allow students who would graduate only if augmentation were approved to walk for graduation but to give them a certificate of compliance with local requirements rather than a diploma. Diplomas will be mailed out to these students when the bill becomes effective, which will most likely be in September 2008 (ADE, 2008).

### **Maryland Adds New Alternative Assessments**

Although newspapers have been flooded with stories of students who cannot achieve passing scores on the exit exam despite repeated attempts, the Maryland Board of Education continues to move forward with plans to enforce the HSA as a graduation requirement starting with the class of 2009. However, in response to the growing concerns, the state board agreed to make certain changes and approved a number of alternative options. These include:

- The Maryland Adult External High School Diploma
- The GED
- Specific Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate course exams
- A combined-score option for which students must attain a combined score of 1602 (no minimum score required for individual tests)
- The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation
- A modified High School Assessment for students with disabilities who fall outside the NCLB 2% exemption

The Bridge Plan for Academic Validation was approved in November 2007. This plan allows students who repeatedly fail the HSA to instead complete assigned projects for the assessments that they are unable to pass. For a student to participate in the Bridge Plan, he or she must be firmly on the path to completing graduation requirements, have taken an HSA exam twice without passing or meeting the combined-score option, and have participated in locally administered or approved assistance.

### **New Jersey**

The Special Review Assessment (SRA) has been New Jersey's alternative to the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), the state's high school exit exam, for many years. But with about 12% of high school seniors failing to achieve passing scores on the HSPA and graduating using the SRA, this alternative has come under attack as a "backdoor" path to a high school diploma. In response to such criticism, the department of education and the state board of education announced plans to phase out the SRAs, but opted not to in response to the public's interest in some type of alternative opportunity for struggling students (NJSBE, 2008).

Instead, the state board of education decided to improve the SRA by: establishing specific SRA administration windows; having the state test vendor assign and distribute performance tasks directly to high schools; having the state vendor organize and supervise scoring by New Jersey teachers in regional scoring centers; and requiring districts in which 10% of their students use the SRA to submit a plan for reducing student reliance on it. These changes will become effective in 2009-10.



In addition, students who have met all other graduation requirements except passing the HSPA can either return to school at testing time the following year and retake the HSPA or pass the GED test. New Jersey also has adult high school programs in which a student can earn a district high school diploma. There is also the Thirty College Credit program, by which a student can be awarded a state-issued high school diploma for documented college credits earned.

## Recent Reports Challenge High School Exit Exams

While 26 states currently implement or will soon implement the requirement that students pass state-mandated high school exams in order to receive their high school diploma and state officials from other states consider implementing such requirements, reports continue to come out challenging such policies. Following are brief summaries of some of the reports that have made national news.

### Exit Exams Do Not Affect Student Achievement

Researchers Eric Grodsky from University of California, Davis; John R. Warren from University of Minnesota; and Demetra Kalogrides, also from University of California, Davis, released a report that has undergone peer review and been accepted for publication in the *Educational Policy* journal. The researchers used the Long-Term Trend data collected as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (LTT NAEP) to examine (1) the effects of state HSEE on long-term trends on academic achievement in mathematics and reading; (2) differences in the effects of state HSEE policies for students from different socioeconomic, academic, and racial/ethnic backgrounds; (3) differences in the effects of state HSEE policies related to difficulty of the state test (minimum competency v. more difficult exams); and (4) the effects of state HSEE on student achievement at the upper and lower ends of the achievement distribution.

The researchers did not find significant effects of exit examinations on academic achievement in either reading or mathematics. This was true for both minimum-competency exams and “more difficult” comprehensive exams. They explained that the absence of effects for even more difficult exams may be due to the small number of years that some states have had the more difficult exams, or it may be that the “more difficult” exams are not substantially more difficult than minimum-competency exams. The researchers explained that the lack of any effect of exit exams on average achievement may mask the effects on inequalities among students and on achievement at different points of the achievement distribution. In subsequent analyses, the authors found that exit exams have no effect on achievement for students at various points on the achievement distribution.

Finally, the authors asked whether the effects of exit exams might be concentrated among students with particular background characteristics. In the end they found that absence of effects of exit exams holds regardless of students’ race/ethnicity, parent education, home environment, and grade level. Overall, the researchers found little evidence of effects of state high school exit exams on student mathematics or reading achievement, and such effects, they stated, “are hardly worth the substantial economic and personal costs of state HSEEs to students, parents, teachers, and the general public.” (Grodsky et al., 2008)

### Several Recent Reports Challenge California’s Exit Exam

In October 2007, the eighth annual report produced by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), *Independent Evaluation of the California High School Exit Examination* (CAHSEE), was presented to the state board of education. Among other things, the evaluation concluded that:

- Although the number of students dropping out of school in grades 9-11 has remained constant from 2000-06, the number of student dropouts at the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade level has increased substantially. In the class of 2006, 34,097 students in grade 12 dropped out compared to 25,133 in the class of 2005. All ethnic groups, including white students, have seen an increase in dropouts. However, the Hispanic and African American subgroups have had the highest increases (4.4 and 7.1 percentage point increases, respectively; both above the overall 3.7 percentage point increase).
- Although more students are completing Algebra I/Integrated Math I by 12<sup>th</sup> grade, students benefit most from completing these courses in earlier grades. In 2007, 68% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who completed Algebra I in 8<sup>th</sup> grade achieved a passing score on the math part of the CAHSEE. Yet only 32.7% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who completed Algebra I in 12<sup>th</sup> grade achieved a passing score.
- While the percentage of students taking AP exams and the SAT has increased, the total post-secondary enrollment has decreased. The percentage of students taking AP exams increased from 12.8% in 2000 to 25.5% in 2006, with an increase in the percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students scoring 3 or higher (from 14.2% to 26.3%). The percentage of students taking the SAT increased from 36.5% in 2000 to 40.5% in 2007, though the percentage of students scoring 1000 or higher remained constant. Despite increased enrollment in California's four-year universities, a decrease in the number of students enrolled in community colleges has led to a total decline in post-secondary enrollment (from 176,358 in 2000 to 172,797 in 2006).
- Most students reported that they would retake the exam if they did not achieve a passing score (about 90% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 82% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and 73% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders). But the evaluation also revealed that the majority of students who achieve passing scores on both parts of the test by 11<sup>th</sup> grade passed the tests on their first attempt in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Pass rates for retakes are much lower. Even repeat 10<sup>th</sup> graders pass at much lower rates. English learners, however, seem to benefit the most from retesting in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, when an additional 18.9% of these students achieve passing scores (Wise et al., 2007).

This last point is consistent with findings presented in a report titled, *Predicting Success, Preventing Failure: An Investigation of the California High School Exit Exam*, published by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). The authors, Andrew Zau and Julian Betts, looked at test scores and other data for students in the San Diego Unified School District and found that, in this district, only a small fraction of the seniors who failed the CAHSEE in the 2005-06 school year retook the exam the following school year, and of those who did, only 3.1% achieved passing scores. Most importantly, the authors concluded that students at risk of failing the CAHSEE can be identified as early as grade 4. They reported that academic grade point average (GPA) is the strongest predictor of future outcomes on the CAHSEE, followed by absences and classroom behavior. They reported that English language learners, African American students, and students with disabilities are less likely to pass the test. Furthermore, the authors identified a few predictors of success on the CAHSEE. These include a one-point increase in GPA, a large increase in math and ELA scores on the California Standards Test in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and early achievement of English language fluency for ELL students.

These findings are contradictory to California's assembly bills 128 and 347, which focus funds for remediation and additional support at grade 12 and two years after grade 12. The authors suggest, among other things, the development of an "early warning system" to identify students, targeting funds toward elementary and middle school students at risk of failing; rigorous studies to determine the effect of assembly bills 128 and 347; and rigorous evaluations of alternative interventions (PPIC, 2008).

Work conducted by the California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) further supports some of the findings reported by HumRRO and by PPIC. In a *Statistical Brief* released in May 2008, CDRP reported that the dropout rate in grade 12 has increased by about 40% in the past decade, with the biggest increase taking place in the 2005-06 school year, the first year of the CAHSEE requirement. In fact, from 1995 to



2006, dropout rates for students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade remained steady at about 1%. The rates for students in 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> grade declined from 4% to 3%, and rates for students in grade 12 increased from 4.7% to 7.7% (Rotermund, 2008).

CDRP released another report in which they explained what happened to a group of 167 seniors in the class of 2007 who had not passed the CAHSEE by fall of their senior year yet remained enrolled in school until the end of the school year. These students, who were described as “persistent strugglers” and “hard-working educational persisters,” were disproportionately Latino students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and for the most part (79%) English language learners. This is consistent with HumRRO’s finding that ELL students are the students who benefit most from retest opportunities. These students did not have the characteristics of high school dropouts.

The authors of the CDRP report also found that higher GPA, higher scores on the ELA section of the California Standards Test, and English language proficiency are all strong predictors of students’ ability to pass the CAHSEE. And like the authors of the PPIC report, these authors suggested implementing early-intervention programs. They also agree with continuing support for students who are persistent despite struggles and repeated failure on the CAHSEE (Jimerson et al., 2008).





# Chapter 2: Understanding the Move Toward End-of-Course Exams

## Introduction

In the 2007 CEP report on state high school exit exams, we noted an increase in the number of states with mandatory exit exams that had begun adopting end-of-course exams (EOCs). EOC tests assess mastery of specific high school courses, are usually standards-based, and are taken after the completion of a specific course. These differ from other exams, which tend to be larger, comprehensive exams taken in a specific grade (typically 10<sup>th</sup>) and cover material taught throughout several grades. To better understand this trend, we further investigated the reasons some states are moving toward end-of-course exams. This chapter presents findings from our study involving some of the states that we have been tracking in this trend.

In particular, we examined the movement toward the adoption of end-of-course exams by asking state education officials and school district administrators to discuss (1) reasons why their states have adopted end-of-course exams; (2) plans for how states will use end-of-course exams; (3) responses to the adoption of the exams; and (4) benefits and challenges associated with the adoption of these exams. We also asked national education experts similar questions regarding the trend to adopt end-of-course exams. This chapter presents the perspectives of these stakeholders about the movement toward end-of-course exams. The lessons learned from this study hold relevance for a number of states that may be considering or have already adopted EOCs.

## Key Findings

- ▶ State education officials reported many reasons for adopting end-of-course exams. Representatives from all six states that participated in our interviews reported that they are doing so to improve overall accountability, increase academic rigor, and achieve alignment between state standards and curriculum.
- ▶ While all state education officials interviewed reported using end-of-course exams as a tool for ensuring greater accountability, only a few are beginning to consider how to use the assessment as a measure of college and work readiness.
- ▶ Stakeholders highlighted many different ways that data from end-of-course exams can be used. Some interviewees reported that end-of-course exam data, when compared to other test data available, allows for better assessment of content mastery. District administrators spoke about the opportunity of using end-of-course exam data to inform classroom instruction as well as identify areas of professional development for teachers.
- ▶ End-of-course exams have been generally supported by legislators, the business community, parents, and teachers, according to interviewees. Most questions and concerns about end-of-course exams have cen-



tered on the implementation timeline for the exams and the impact that the exams would have on graduation requirements.

- ▶ States face logistical challenges associated with implementing end-of-course exams, such as managing tight timelines required to develop multiple exams or figuring out how to get exam results back to school districts quickly. Other challenges reported include developing remediation for students who do not pass the exams and addressing concerns about the length and frequency of testing.
- ▶ Study participants recommend that states considering adopting end-of-course exams phase in the exam over time. Interviewees also cited the importance of consulting with teachers and other education stakeholders in states that have undergone the process of adopting end-of-course exams. In addition, many interviewees stressed the importance of reviewing state academic standards to ensure that they are rigorous and well-defined before implementing end-of-course exams.

## Participating States

**Table 5** summarizes the six states (Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) that participated in this study with regard to their stage in implementing end-of-course exams, the subjects being assessed in these states, and how the exams are factored into their overall assessment program.

## Reasons for Adopting End-of-Course Exams

### Improving Accountability

All of the stakeholders interviewed reported that the goal of adopting end-of-course exams to replace other types of assessments was linked to improving accountability. As one district administrator explained, “Accountability is what it comes down to. When you have a general test of content that’s not specifically tied to something in the high school, then no one, from the principal on up, knows what to do when students aren’t passing.” Accountability was described in tandem with student performance and classroom instruction. A few state education officials described the adoption of end-of-course exams as a response to legislative mandates that are linked to improved accountability.

The link between accountability and student performance was mentioned by nearly all of the stakeholders we interviewed as a benefit of moving to end-of-course exams. Unlike minimum competency or comprehensive exams, EOCs offer the benefit of assessing students’ understanding of academic content immediately upon completion of the course. According to a state education official:

*There was a desire on the part of the legislature to move away from a single, high-stakes, exit-level test. And the promise of end-of-course exams would be that we can drill down deeper into the material. Obviously it’s better instructionally to assess a student right after they’ve taken the course and still have the material fresh in mind. I think we heard complaints about the students not taking algebra for several years, and it being assessed on an exit-level test.*

One district administrator referenced the benefit of end-of-course exams as a means of improving teacher accountability and creating opportunities for improving instruction:

*With the close alignment to courses, we really start to get some information about what's going on in that course, and if used properly, that empowers teachers. That gives them a greater sense of what is going on in their classroom. The discussion between or among administrators, deans, consultants, and the teacher becomes more focused on how to help each other, rather than on a, "How come you are not doing better?" kind of discussion.*

Another district administrator commenting on the use of end-of-course exams, teacher accountability, and instruction noted:

*How we teach is getting to be very scientific and if we use it properly, it's not a scare tactic for getting rid of teachers. It's an improvement system that really says, 'here is how we do our craft, and here is how it's impacted and here's what the different kinds of kids do on these things.' And that, I think, will help us understand more about learning.*

**Table 5**

**Summary of the Status of Participating States that are Moving Toward End-of-Course Exams**

**States that Have Completely Shifted to End-of-Course Exams**

**Mississippi:** End-of-course exams have been administered since 2000-01. They were phased in as a graduation requirement, eventually replacing the minimum-competency exam. End-of-course graduation requirements followed this schedule: 2003, U.S. history; 2004, U.S. history and English II (with a writing component); 2005, U.S. history, English II (with a writing component), and Biology I; 2006, U.S. history, English II (with a writing component), Biology I, and Algebra I.

**Tennessee:** End-of-course exams have been administered since 2001-02. Beginning with students graduating in the class of 2013, there will be end-of-course exams in 10 subject areas (English I, English II, English III, Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, Biology I, chemistry, physics, and U.S. history). At that time the tests will account for 25% of the grade for each course.

**States that Will Have a Dual Testing System (Comprehensive Standards-based and End-of-Course Exams)**

**Massachusetts:** End-of-course exams will become a graduation requirement for students graduating in the class of 2010. These students will be required to pass a science end-of-course exam in one of four science content areas (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, and technology/engineering). The four science exams have already been developed. Students graduating in the class of 2012 will also be required to pass a U.S. history end-of-course exam. Pilot testing for the U.S. history test took place in May 2007 and May 2008. Science and history testing requirements will be in addition to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts and mathematics Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams.

**South Carolina:** Beginning with the graduating class of 2010, students will be required to pass a high school credit course in science in which an end-of-course examination is administered. The proposed science test will be biology. Items for this end-of-course test will be field-tested in spring of 2008 and 2009. The exam will count as 20% of the final grade in the course. This requirement will be in addition to the already existing High School Assessment Program (HSAP), which assesses English language arts and mathematics.

**States in the Process of Shifting to End-of-Course Exams**

**New Jersey:** The state is planning to adopt end-of-course exams as a graduation requirement starting with students graduating in the class of 2012. A pilot end-of-course exam was given in May 2008 in biology and Algebra II. Students currently take the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), a comprehensive standards-based test.

**Texas:** End-of-course exams have recently been adopted. They will replace the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skill (TAKS) starting with students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2011-12. Twelve end-of-course exams (English I, English II, English III, Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, Biology I, chemistry, physics, U.S. history, world history, and world geography) are expected to be developed to cover four core subject areas. Students will be required to take three end-of-course assessments in each of the four core subjects. A minimum average score will be required for passing each test. The tests will be averaged into course grades and will account for 15% of the grade for each course.

## Increasing Rigor in Curriculum

Another reason for adopting end-of-course exams cited by interviewees was the connection between EOCs and rigor. One national education expert agreed and said, “One reason for wanting to use end-of-course tests is to ratchet up the content that kids are expected to master.” All of the district administrators and state education officials we interviewed discussed the potential that end-of-course exams might have on improving the rigor of course content. Again, this was referenced in contrast to general, comprehensive exams. One state education official noted:

*We think that the end-of-course tests are a better way of assessing the content knowledge that we expect students to know based on our core curriculum content standards. We also feel that end-of-course tests will drive improvements in the content areas that are taught. We know that some courses called Algebra I, geometry, are very basic, low level. If we test in Algebra I, and the other courses, if we show how the assessment will be aligned to the standards and we give a course description, we think that that will drive up the rigor of the content that's being taught.*

In describing the desire to improve rigor, a few interviewees mentioned the importance of articulating a K-12 curriculum. As one district administrator noted, “Looking at end-of-course assessments and moving to rigorous graduation requirements, we have to ask, ‘What does the middle school education have to look like to ensure that students have the most opportunity for success at the high school level, when more is expected?’”

## Aligning Curriculum to Academic Standards

The process of reviewing local curriculum in preparation for the implementation of end-of-course exams was described by most participants as a necessary step for improving alignment between the local curriculum, instruction, and state standards. For most interviewees, the alignment process was a distinguishing feature of the end-of-course test compared to other types of assessments. As one education expert said, “The end-of-course test basically provides the right kind of alignment between standard tests and curriculum in ways that other forms of high school testing don’t.” One district administrator said she realized the need for curriculum mapping, which involves knowing the state standards and aligning the curriculum with those standards. “Once you have your alignment,” she said, “and you’ve got your curriculum in front of you, and you kind of know where your roadmap is leading you . . . you can actually focus on how to best teach this to the children.”

A district administrator agreed that end-of-course exams ensure that teachers cover the curriculum and create consistency between subject area teachers:

*Well, I support the EOCs and I'm glad we're doing it. As a former principal, one of the things that I tried to make sure we were doing was covering the same material in algebra classes, because that wasn't always the case. When we have a set of standards, you find, in many cases, that teachers have specific areas within their content where they love to focus. Well, with the EOCs, we have to make sure that we're covering the material that needs to be covered, as outlined in those standards. So it's created that consistency, I think, from class to class, and that's something that I've really appreciated with these exams.*

Another state education official talked about how EOCs create consistency and alignment in curriculum and instruction from the primary grades through the secondary grades. “We talk to our districts about letting the subject area teacher talk to the elementary and middle grade teachers, because there has got to be a continuum.”

## Use of End-of-Course Exams

While all state education officials we interviewed reported that end-of-course exams are used as a graduation requirement, only a few noted the potential of these exams to help prepare students for the world of work or college. One of the hopes expressed by some stakeholders is that end-of-course exams will improve the validity and rigor of courses in ways that will help reduce the need for remediation in postsecondary institutions and to better prepare students for the workforce. As one expert explained, "...these tests have the potential for being used by postsecondary systems in ways that high school tests of any kind have never been used before." While all stakeholders acknowledged the potential benefit of linking postsecondary institutions and employment readiness to the results of the end-of-course exams, few have made substantial progress in establishing these links.

## College Readiness and Placement

One state developing linkages between end-of-course exams and postsecondary institutions for the purpose of college placement is Texas. Texas is also part of a college readiness movement that links assessment to student preparation for postsecondary coursework. Texas recently adopted the College Readiness Standards (CRS) in English/language arts, social sciences, mathematics, and science. According to education officials, once these standards are fully implemented, they will better align public and higher education curriculum, allowing students to easily transition between high school and college and the workforce. Further, state education officials report that a separate section of their end-of-course exams will be devoted to questions that assess college readiness. The college readiness component will not count toward the graduation requirement. One state education official in Texas who described the college readiness component said, "It's sort of on top of the graduation requirement. I do think that it will have an effect on instruction and make instruction a little bit more rigorous so that more kids have the capacity to meet that college readiness measure."

A few stakeholders from other states expressed interest in developing dialogue with postsecondary institutions to discuss the use of end-of-course assessment data for the purposes of college readiness and college placement. Most comments focused on the potential use for the exams rather than on current practices, as one district administrator noted:

*To me, [end-of-course exams] give us better ground to have better discussions with colleges about college readiness. Right now, college readiness is basically accusatory and based on vague standards. [These exams] give us some real, good, solid data. If they didn't do well, how did they do on the algebra end-of-course exam, and can we change those to make them to be more in line with college readiness standards. So I think there are some really interesting benefits coming along.*

Another district administrator added:

*I also think that there is a place for a generic writing test and a generic college preparatory, college readiness-type test. We hear from a lot of colleges and universities that the high school students are not coming out prepared to write well enough to be in a four-year comprehensive college, and they don't process information at a college level yet.*

While Texas has made progress in the use of end-of-course exams as an indicator for college readiness and college placement decisions, the other states in this study report they are still exploring this issue and were vague in their responses about specific future plans. One expert noted the role that improved rigor might play in generating more interest in the use of end-of-course exams as a college readiness and college placement benchmark:

*Here is another test in which some kids did better than others, and if you want to figure out who you should let into your college, you probably should take the kids who did better rather than the kids who did worse. That's about all you get out of that and that does not add any information to what they already have, so they don't use it, but if you peg the test at a rigorous enough level, then you can get them to pay attention to it. At least that's what we are aiming for.*

## Employment Readiness

Most study participants did not directly link EOCs with employment readiness, which is similar to our findings about employment readiness and exit exams in general. Only a few interviewees talked about employment readiness, and in these instances, they spoke about the potential use for the exams rather than their current use. One district administrator, contemplating the potential that end-of-course exams might have for employment purposes, noted:

*As we evolve as a country and we lose some of the manufacturing jobs, there may be some job opportunities where you would have to demonstrate proficiency in mechanical drawing or architectural drawing or some level of chemistry without needing a full college diploma. I almost think that they would look towards associate degrees and community colleges and not the high school level but, we may evolve to where it counts more.*

Another district administrator noted that if employers were made aware of end-of-course exams, they might consider them when considering job applicants.

## Use of Data Generated from End-of-Course Exams

Almost all of the district administrators and state education officials agreed that data generated from end-of-course exams offers information that other exams, such as comprehensive exams, do not. Stakeholders talked about how end-of-course exams allow for a more in-depth assessment of how well students have mastered course content and how the data might be used for interventions. One state education official commenting on the ability of end-of-course exams to provide more in-depth information noted, “We’ll be able to delve deeper into the subject matter rather than having just a few questions scattered through an exit-level test.”

Interviewees also described some of the ways that end-of-course exam data could be used to target areas for improved instruction and professional development for teachers. A state education official commenting on the link between end-of-course data and teacher accountability noted:

*The nature of end-of-course testing is such that it connects more directly, more immediately to an instructional period and by extension an instructor or set of instructors with a more fully demarcated content area. It's certainly not the intention of the state to use end-of-course testing as a way to evaluate teachers, but there's no getting around the fact that it will give an individual high school a more direct handle on how well its biology teachers are teaching biology or its geometry teachers are teaching geometry.*

A district administrator describing the data generated by the end-of-course exam and the usefulness of the data said:

*With the end-of-course exams we get back different reports. The data will show which items the students had trouble with, and then the teacher can take that information and prepare lessons more effectively. It gives us data on our school as a whole . . . how our school compares with other school districts in the state that take those same end-of-course exams. It's really a tool that we can use with classroom teachers to prepare for teaching more effectively.*



Another district administrator, reflecting on the potential use of end-of-course exam data, said the data will help show how students are learning, and provides an “interesting microscope . . . into how teachers are doing. This hopefully will be used for very effective in-staff development and in-service for our teachers, rather than as an evaluation tool.”

## Overall Positive Response to End-of-Course Exams

Most interviewees reported that stakeholders such as legislators, business leaders, parents, and teachers supported the adoption of end-of-course exams, with few exceptions. A state education official in Tennessee described the support base in his state:

*We’ve seen a real push in our curriculum and instruction that has some kind of grass roots component. It’s coming from the community, from businesses, and from other leaders who see the economic advantages to having a very skilled work force. These are the same advantages associated with having a very educated population of people who live in the state, and so they want them to be college and work ready. They wanted higher levels of instruction. They wanted students to not only know but to be able to apply the information that they’ve learned.*

### Support from Education Stakeholders

The idea of overall support for improvement and changes offered by end-of-course exams was the prevailing sentiment for all of the stakeholders who participated in this study. Some participants also noted that the cost of adopting and implementing end-of-course exams was seen as a benefit by some education stakeholders, especially state legislators. For example, one state education official reported, “The legislators are pretty well pleased because they are always looking at the cost of things, and this is one of our cheaper programs. The tests are total multiple-choice, and 30% of the end-of-course exams are delivered online.” However, education experts were unsure whether or not EOCs were really going to be less costly, given the number of tests that may ultimately be developed in a state.

### Support from Teachers and Parents

According to most district administrators and state education officials interviewed in this study, teachers and parents are generally supportive of the end-of-course exams. However, given the limitations of the study, we were unable to interview teachers or parents to corroborate this finding. Thus in the following sections, we present only what state and district administrators told us about how EOCs were received by teachers and parents.

#### Teachers

Teachers in one state were reported to have been primarily interested in getting practical information about the test. For example, teachers wanted to know when the exam would become a graduation requirement, details about the availability of practice tests, the length of the test, and questions and other concerns that one district administrator described as “teacher questions.” According to other stakeholders, a key factor in garnering teacher support for end-of-course exams was involving teachers in the adoption process. As one district administrator noted, “We make sure we have teachers at the table, administrators, counselors—all of those people who are going to be impacted sitting at the table.”

A state education official summarized a number of questions that teachers had regarding end-of-course exams. Some questions appeared to be similar to questions stakeholders have for exit exams in general. For example, one state education official reported that teachers wanted to know whether the exam would count for graduation the first time it was administered, and what alternative assessments would look like, and how

they could help prepare students. But other questions seemed more specific to EOCs, such as wanting to know whether districts with block scheduling would have the end-of-course testing at the end of the course (some block schedule courses are semester-based, with some students taking the test in winter and some in fall); or whether the state would provide a course description that would define the standards in life sciences.

### Parents

Interviewees reported that parents were for the most part supportive of end-of-course exams. Most stakeholders talked about the importance of providing timely information to help parents understand the implementation process. Some district administrators identified concerns that parents have about end-of-course exams. These concerns are usually very specific to their own child's performance on EOCs. For example, some parents are critical of the end-of-course exams when their child is not able to pass the exam. This situation is critical when students pass the course but not the exam. Another district administrator noted, "Sometimes there is frustration about whether students really have to know this in order to graduate."

## Challenges Associated with the Use of End-of-Course Exams

The major challenges mentioned during this study involved the logistics associated with developing and implementing end-of-course exams, usually under a tight timeline. A few interviewees also highlighted the difficulty associated with managing the review and revision of academic content standards while at the same time trying to maintain a schedule for piloting the exam or introducing new test items. While these concerns were highlighted in connection with EOCs, they seemed to be concerns of state testing in general. One education expert summarized some of these challenges associated with end-of-course exams as follows:

*If you think that end-of-course exams are a good idea in principle but you want to make sure that you also have good exams, then there's a set of issues that are both test construction and implementation issues. It's how do we make sure that we can have a test that you get the results back quickly and has a strong performance component to it, whether it's essays, or open-ended items, or whatever. And how do we make that component as robust as possible and still get the scores back on time.*

A state education official described the challenge of managing the timing issue:

*Timing is critical. A problem that we're experiencing right now is that we are in the process of rewriting our curriculum standards and trying to infuse new college readiness standards into them. So the calendar is somewhat challenging right now because as we field test items and put out the first administration, we might also have to revise the assessments based on changes in curriculum standards as well as the infusion of college readiness standards. I think that if I were doing this over again, I would have the calendars lined up a little better.*

Other challenges reported were more specific to end-of-course exams. For example, one school district official noted how some high schools with alternate kinds of scheduling may face distinct challenges with end-of-course exams. High schools with block scheduling may end up having students take the end-of-course exam either several months after students finish the course or even three-quarters of the way through a course. One administrator whose district adopted a 4x4 intensive block schedule recommended that end-of-course testing not be given at "some arbitrary date" but rather allow for a flexible testing schedule to accommodate schools that do not have traditional schedules.

## Providing EOC Results to School Districts in a Timely Manner

A common challenge mentioned by stakeholders was managing the turnaround of the scores for the end-of-course tests. One state reported that it addresses this challenge by offering shorter exams that are 100% multiple-choice and can be completed online. Other states administer exams with open-response items where the scores are not made available until the beginning of the following school year. While many acknowledged that multiple-choice exams may address the time issue, other interviewees found this solution problematic. As one state education official noted:

*The whole purpose of this is to improve student performance, to evaluate it accurately but to improve performance at the same time, and if we resort to multiple-choice-only tests just for the sake of turning results around quickly, then that defeats the whole purpose. You are turning around results that potentially lack validity or are weak in validity, so what is the point?*

Timeliness of results may also impact whether or not EOCs can be used as part of a student's grade or can even replace the school's final exam.

## Adopting Multiple EOCs May Increase Frequency of Testing

Other stakeholders raised issues about the challenges associated with the length and frequency of testing. The states included in this study are implementing anywhere from four to twelve end-of-course exams in various subjects. One district administrator commenting on this challenge said, "This is a logistics thing more than an academic thing, but what bothers me with testing is we do too much of it; it's too long, and it disrupts the school day too much."

One state education official added:

*A lot of this "testing to death" happens because there's so much test prep and there's over benchmarking. Kids at the local level are doing a lot of testing just to get these measures across the year to determine whether or not kids are going to pass the test. What we really ought to do is make sure that kids are learning the curriculum and that they're developing an understanding of what's actually being taught and of course making sure that the curriculum is a good match and fit for what you are testing them on.*

## The Challenges of Remediating Students Who Do Not Pass EOCs

A few stakeholders discussed the challenges related to remediation for students who do not pass the end-of-course exams and alternative assessments. Many of the states that have only recently adopted end-of-course exams are still working through the details of how remediation will work. Some interviewees stressed that the timing of remediation is crucial, and that remediation should occur shortly after students complete the course. One education expert advised, "You've got to give them enough tutoring and remediation to enable them to pass the test, hopefully sometime in the first semester or the next year, and move forward." A state education official described the problem of remediation and the timing of remediation this way:

*We don't know how we're going to deal with it yet. It's something that we've talked a lot about. I mean, how do you remediate a student? I am assuming that some of it is going to be done through individualized computer programs, but if a student passed his geometry class and doesn't pass the geometry end-of-course exam, he is now on to Algebra II but still needs to retake geometry. That's one of the biggest challenges that we're going to have. School districts are going to try to figure out how to run instructional interventions with kids when they're no longer in these classes.*

A district administrator provided insight into what the process of remediation at the local level entails:

*We have a plan in place for students who are not successful. When they take their end-of-course exams, we provide them with tutoring . . . We even remediate students at risk; those students are referred for tutoring or to an interventionist who is more or less like a tutor. We try to do our part in making our students successful. They can take the test over. Sometimes when they have gotten to their senior year and have not passed an exam, we find that they might drop out. Our district has been fortunate in that we could almost count on one hand those who have gotten to their senior year and have not completed the requirement of state testing. Even after their senior year, if they want to come back and take that exam again, they can.*

## Recommendations Regarding End-of-Course Exams

As more states adopt end-of-course exams, there will be a growing number of lessons learned regarding managing the challenges that are inherent in adopting these assessments. One education expert recommended that states consider adopting more “out-of-the-box thinking” with regard to how they approach the adoption and implementation of end-of-course exams. For example, this expert suggested that states consider options such as implementing state end-of-course exams in place of local high school final exams to avoid excessive testing and duplication of effort. In order to ensure that the end-of-course exams could be graded in time, they could be divided into sections and taken at different times during the semester and could include both essay and online multiple-choice.

In the following section, we offer lessons learned from state education officials and district administrators who have implemented or are in the process of implementing end-of-course exams. Their recommendations centered primarily on some of the more pragmatic issues associated with adopting end-of-course exams.

### Phase in End-of-Course Exams

Both state education officials and district administrators stressed the importance of implementing end-of-course exams over time, particularly when the test is to become a high-stakes graduation requirement. One state education official noted:

*I think that if we had tried to do everything at once, it would have put an enormous strain on everybody, especially since we were doing multiple subjects. I think that the phasing-in process helps. We gave every test for a period of years before it became a graduation requirement, and there was time for teachers to get familiar with the test and get familiar with what's expected instructionally. Students, even though they weren't necessarily going to have it count as a graduation requirement, had exposure, and that helped us gain information for those students that would be held accountable.*

### Adopt End-of-Course Exams in Consultation with Stakeholders

All interviewees agreed on the importance of bringing all stakeholders into the implementation process. Teachers were recognized as being integral to the development process, especially to increase buy-in. One state education official recommended:

*Try to keep the teachers in the process because when they feel ownership, things go much better. If it feels like things are being thrust upon them without their knowledge or say-so, then there will be more of a fight. But if they see what is happening step-by-step and are part of it, then the majority of them will probably support it.*

## Review State Content Standards

Many stakeholders addressed the relationship between developing EOCs and state content standards as stressed by one district administrator:

*I don't care whatever type of testing, make sure that your content standards are rigorous enough and defined well enough that you can communicate them from the administration all the way down to the classroom teacher, and make sure that that's in place before you go to putting any high-stakes exam out there. I think that's a really important piece and sometimes we forget about [it].*

Another district administrator agreed and commented, “I think that the key is having a solid set of standards in place first, making sure that people understand the standards.” Stakeholders mentioned the importance of having teachers review standards while developing EOCs and the need for well-defined, rigorous content standards aligned with other instructional supports. One state education official noted:

*Use a lot of teacher committees to look at the standards and they should be sure that those standards are agreed upon as much as possible. And continue to use teachers to review items whenever possible. Make sure content standards are rigorous enough, well-defined and aligned with all other instructional supports.*

A district administrator, commenting on the process in his state remarked,

*We have a good deal of teacher involvement. With our teacher committees we have passage review for English, we have item review across all four [exams] and we have data review across all four [exams] and we have bias review for all content areas.*

## Prepare Teachers for Implementation of End-of-Course Exams

The idea that teachers should be prepared for the implementation of end-of-course exams through training and professional development was widespread. In part, it was linked to the accountability that falls on teachers who teach in subjects that are tested. As one state education official said:

*Something I am talking quite a bit about in anticipation of the next legislative session is what training and professional development are we going to offer teachers prior to the implementation of these new exams to make sure that they're ready in terms of what their instructional practices are in the classroom.*

## Consult Other States Regarding End-of-Course Exams

Although only a few stakeholders reported that they consulted with other states that had adopted end-of-course exams as part of their implementation plan, most advised talking with more experienced states before adopting EOCs. One state education official suggested, “borrow some of the same techniques that were used in other places. That would probably shorten the process some.” Many stakeholders also talked about moving toward implementation of end-of-course exams in consultation with testing agencies and in partnership with consortiums.

## Conclusions

Interviewees were very optimistic about the potential that end-of-course exams offer to improve accountability and classroom instruction, to serve as a more rigorous measure of student mastery of course material, and to apply to life beyond high school. However, few of the stakeholders in this study were able to cite research linking these potential outcomes with the use of end-of-course exams. Many states appear to be moving more toward end-of-course exams (and away from comprehensive exams) because they seem to make more sense in terms of alignment with existing high school curriculum.

It is also too early to tell the true impact of the move to end-of-course exams. For example, Mississippi enforced the graduation requirement of end-of-course exams beginning in 2003 with the first of four end-of-course exams, but the graduation requirement did not cover all four end-of-course exams until two years ago, in 2006. Tennessee began to enforce the requirement in 2005, but the state is still undergoing changes, with plans to add more end-of-course exams in the future. All other states in this study are still in the process of developing these exams.

When asked about potential research studies that could be undertaken to promote implementation, one stakeholder mentioned the need for research on what actually works. While there is some research on implementing end-of-course exams (ie., Massell, et al., 2005), there clearly is a need for more specific and detailed studies about not only implementation issues but about the impact of these exams on curriculum, instruction and special populations of students (such as English language learners and students with disabilities). Findings from a recent study commissioned by the Washington State Board of Education, for example, indicate that end-of-course exams alone are not linked to improved classroom teaching, curriculum quality, or student learning (Vranek, 2008).

This study also indicates a need to better understand how the implementation of end-of-course exams impacts issues like remediation for students who do not pass these exams and alternative testing for students with disabilities and English language learners.

Although there is much talk about the potential use of end-of-course exams for higher education placement and to counter the need for remediation in higher-education institutions, most of the states in this study are still focusing on the details of how to implement end-of-course exams most effectively.



## Profiles of State Exit Exam Systems

The profiles included in the CD that accompanies this report provide basic information about the exit exam systems and policies in the 26 states that currently have or are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams. The profiles also provide data on pass rates and state funding for remediation.

The information in the profiles was taken from the responses of officials in participating states to CEP's 2008 state survey of exit exam policies and from state Web sites and media coverage. The survey responses were condensed and edited somewhat to fit a standard format for the profiles. After developing the profiles, CEP sent draft profiles to the survey contacts in each state and asked them to review the content for accuracy. The final profiles included on the CD reflect the changes states made as a result of that review process.

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