



INFORMATION CAPSULE

Research Services

Vol. 1202

Christie Blazer, Supervisor

July 2012

NATIONAL TRENDS IN END-OF-COURSE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

At a Glance

This report provides a summary of states currently administering end-of-course (EOC) assessments. The number of EOC assessments administered by states, the subjects most likely to have an associated EOC exam, and the purpose of EOC exams (for example, percentage of the final course grade and/or graduation requirement) are reviewed. State policies regarding the testing of students who transfer from private schools or out-of-state schools are summarized. In an effort to help school districts and states avoid similar difficulties, some of the problems encountered by Texas school districts during the initial administration of their spring 2012 EOC assessments are also discussed. Finally, a brief review of Florida's EOC assessment program is provided.

End-of-Course (EOC) assessments have gained popularity nationwide in recent years. EOC assessments are similar to the final exams taken upon completion of a course, but they are standardized statewide tests. These exams are designed to link high school assessments more closely with course curriculum standards and to better prepare students for postsecondary education or joining the workforce. Advocates of EOC assessments maintain that they are better predictors of college success and work readiness than classroom grades or comprehensive exit exams. However, EOC assessments present their own set of challenges. For example, statewide implementation of EOC exams can be quite costly and the assessments are not popular with parents who worry about too much testing in schools.

As of spring 2012, 22 states administered EOC exams to all students in associated courses. The Education Commission of the States estimates that this number will increase to 26 states over the next 10 years, as it is anticipated that EOC exams will be implemented in Alabama, Connecticut, Hawaii, and Ohio (Dounay Zinth, 2012). [Note: This report does not include states administering American Diploma Project EOC assessments.]

The number of EOC assessments administered by each state ranges from one to 16. Table 1 shows how many EOC assessments are administered by each state.

Table 1. Number of EOC Exams Administered by Each State

Number of EOC Exams Administered	State
1	New Jersey
3	Indiana, North Carolina, Washington
4	Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, South Carolina
5	Delaware, Florida
6	Louisiana
7	Oklahoma
8	Missouri
9	Tennessee
10	Georgia
11	Utah
12	Texas, Virginia
13	New York
16	California

Source: Dounay Zinth, 2012.

Purpose of EOC Assessments

Some states administer EOC exams to assess students' mastery of state standards or to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Other states also use EOC exam results to calculate final course grades and/or require students to pass EOC exams to graduate from high school.

At least seven states require scores on EOC assessments to be factored into students' final course grades:

- In Florida, EOC assessment scores count as 30 percent of students' final course grade. [Additional information on Florida's EOC assessments is provided in the *On a Local Note* section of this report.]
- The state of Georgia mandates that EOC exam scores count as 15 percent of students' final course grade.
- In Kentucky and South Carolina, EOC exam scores count as 20 percent of students' final course grade.
- In North Carolina, EOC exam results must comprise at least 25 percent of students' final course grade.

- For Tennessee students who entered grade 9 in fall 2009 and 2010, EOC exam scores count as 20 percent of their final course grade; for Tennessee students entering grade 9 in fall 2011 and thereafter, EOC exam scores count as 25 percent of their final course grade.
- In Texas, State Statute requires that EOC assessments count as 15 percent of students' final grade. However, Texas' Commissioner of Education deferred implementation of the 15 percent grading requirement for the 2011-2012 school year.

Eight states require students to pass one or more EOC assessments in order to graduate from high school: Arkansas, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, and Virginia. The Education Commission of the States estimates that this number will most likely increase to 15 states by 2020, with the implementation of EOC assessments as exit exams in Florida, as well as Alabama, Connecticut, Louisiana, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. (States such as Florida and Texas already require students to pass EOC exams to graduate, but their policies took effect beginning with students who have not yet reached grade 12. For example, Texas' EOC exams will be used as a graduation requirement starting with students who first enrolled in grade 9 in the 2011-2012 school year and are not scheduled to graduate until 2015.)

EOC Assessments, by Subject Area

The Center on Education Policy's (2011) survey of state department of education officials reported that states administering EOC exams typically test students in more subjects than states with comprehensive exams. Based on data provided by the Education Commission of the States (Dounay Zinth, 2012), Table 2 displays the number of states administering EOC exams in each subject.

Table 2. Number of States Administering EOC Exams, by Subject Area

Subject Area	Number of States Administering EOC Exam
Biology	21
Algebra	20
English	17
History and/or Government	15
Geometry	12
Chemistry	7
Physics	6
Earth or Physical Science	5
Geography	2
Integrated Mathematics	2

Source: Dounay Zinth, 2012.

Subjects in which only one state administers an EOC exam include:

- Integrated Science (California);
- Living Environment (New York);
- Economics/Business/Free Enterprise (Georgia);
- Technology/Engineering (Massachusetts);
- French, Italian, and Spanish (New York); and
- Civics (Florida).

The Education Commission of the States has provided a full listing of states with current or pending state-level EOC assessments, the subjects in which EOC exams are administered in each state, and the EOC exams (if any) students must pass in order to graduate from high school. The report, *End-of-Course Exams*, is available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/01/27/10127.pdf>.

EOC Assessment Policies for Transfer Students

Each state education agency has developed its own set of rules governing the procedures for transferring students whose official transcripts demonstrate that they have previously obtained academic credit for courses in which EOC exams are administered. These guidelines apply to students who transfer from out-of-state public, private, or home schools, or from in-state private or home schools. Following are examples of the varying state policies regarding transfer students who have already earned credit in a course for which there is a statewide EOC exam:

- In Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas, students who transfer from private schools or out-of-state public schools are not required to take EOC exams at their new schools if they previously passed a course that is equivalent to the tested course. Students may be granted credit for that course by their new district or school based on an assessment of the student's educational status and determination of whether he or she possesses the requisite passing knowledge (Texas Education Agency, 2012; Kentucky Department of Education, 2011; Taylor & Oliver, 2011; Arkansas Department of Education, 2009; Zabala et al., 2008).
- Georgia distinguishes between students transferring from accredited and non-accredited programs. Students who enroll in Georgia public schools from accredited programs are not required to take and pass EOC exams. Students who transfer from non-accredited programs (such as private schools and home study programs) must take and pass EOC exams in order to receive credit for the course (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).
- In Indiana, out-of-state transfer students are eligible to graduate from public high schools without passing EOC exams if they successfully demonstrate attainment of the Indiana Academic Standards. Written documentation must be provided that the student has attained the academic standards (Indiana Department of Education, 2011).
- Massachusetts requires incoming transfer students to take EOC tests, but allows an appeal in some circumstances. State policy stipulates that students who transfer to a Massachusetts high school must participate in all tests available to them. However, if the student transferred late in his or her senior year and did not have the opportunity to participate in state testing, a "transcript appeal" may be filed to evaluate the student's eligibility for graduation (Domaleski, 2011).

- If a student transfers into a North Carolina public school from outside of the state or from a non-public school, the school principal makes the final decision as to whether the student is to be awarded credit for a course. The school principal has three options: (1) the principal may accept a student's scores from a nationally standardized achievement test and not require additional EOC testing; (2) the principal may require the student to take the EOC test; or (3) the principal may ask the student to take the course, followed by its associated EOC test (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2010).
- Virginia's Board of Education accepts content-based high school EOC exams administered as part of another state's accountability system for the purpose of awarding credit to students who transfer to Virginia public schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

Difficulties Encountered with Texas EOC Assessments

The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) program beginning in spring 2012. At grades 3-8, the STAAR program assesses the same grades and subjects that were assessed by the TAKS. For high school, general subject-area TAKS tests have been replaced with 12 STAAR EOC assessments. STAAR EOC assessments will be used as a graduation requirement starting with students first enrolled in grade 9 in the 2011-2012 school year. To graduate, students must earn passing scores on EOC assessments taken in each of four content areas: English, mathematics, science, and social studies (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Students' scores on EOC exams will count 15 percent towards their final course grade, although Texas' Commissioner of Education deferred the implementation of the 15 percent grading requirement for the 2011-2012 school year. The 15 percent grading requirement will take effect during the 2012-2013 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

In an effort to help school districts and states avoid similar difficulties, some of the problems encountered by Texas school districts during the initial administration of their spring 2012 EOC exams are summarized below.

- Some of Texas' EOC exams were administered as early as March and April 2012. Educators have recommended that EOC exams be given closer to the end of the school year so that students are provided with more classroom instruction prior to sitting for the tests. When students are administered EOC exams before the end of the school year, they may be tested on parts of the curriculum in which they have not yet received instruction (Alexander, 2012).
- Superintendents from across the state testified at a Texas House Public Education Committee Meeting that the adoption of EOC exams as a graduation requirement may result in much higher dropout rates. In order to graduate, students must achieve an average EOC exam passing score in the four core subject areas: English, mathematics, science, and social studies. The Superintendents are concerned that students who fail two or three EOC exams will be more likely to drop out of school because they will believe they cannot catch up. According to testimony offered by the Superintendents, almost 75 percent of the students who failed their EOC assessments in spring 2012 were already considered at risk of dropping out of school (Alexander, 2012).

- States and districts have realized the importance of providing parents, students, and community members with sufficient information so they understand the purpose of the EOC exams, the courses in which students will be required to pass exams, and exactly how the results will be used (for example, percentage of the final course grade and/or graduation requirement). Ysleta Independent School District's Associate Superintendent of Academics said: "It really does require pretty major information campaigning to parents and students so they understand how our district will implement that [15 percent grading] rule" (Kappes, 2012).
- The state has met with some resistance concerning their increased influence over the grading process. Some educators maintain that by taking away local determination of 15 percent of the course grade, states have in effect reduced teachers' ability to exercise professional judgment. Superintendent Damon Murphy of Canutillo Independent School District stated: "The course grading has always been within the arena of the classroom. To take 15 percent away from the classroom teacher and assign it to one exam that is written and administered through the state is a breathtaking change in policy and practice in the state of Texas" (Kappes, 2012).
- The Texas Education Agency has not provided a method for districts to incorporate EOC exam scale scores (ranging from 2,000 to 6,000 points) into the 15 percent grading requirement. This has led to large variations in how Texas school districts integrate EOC scores into final course grades. Ysleta Independent School District's Associate Superintendent of Academics stated: "In this community alone, you have maybe six different ways of calculating 15 percent into a final course grade. That has implications for kids when they transfer. We need to make sure kids don't carry the burden of this rule" (Kappes, 2012).

For example, according to the *El Paso Times*, Socorro Independent School District plans to weigh 7.5 percent of the EOC exam score with each semester average, then combine the two semesters to determine the final grade. El Paso Independent School District plans to average both semesters by 42.5 percent with the 15 percent of the exam. Ysleta Independent School District said they would convert EOC exams' raw scores to a 60- to 100-point scale, then match each score to a corresponding semester point ranging from 9 to 15; points earned on the exams will be added to 85 percent of each semester grade, then both semesters will be averaged (Kappes, 2012).

- The Texas Education Agency has also left it up to local school boards to decide how the 15 percent grading requirement will affect grade point average (GPA) and class rank. The Agency specifies: "Calculations of GPA and class rank should be made in accordance with local policies, guidelines, and administrative regulations." Some Texas school districts decided that in addition to 15 percent of the final course grade, EOC exam scores will be used to determine GPA and class rank. Other districts decided that EOC exam scores will not affect GPA or class rank. However, according to a *Star-Telegram* (2012) editorial, districts realized that inclusion of EOC exam scores in calculations of GPA and class rankings could lower those measures and put students at a disadvantage when competing for college admissions. These districts are now reconsidering their policy.

On a Local Note

The Florida End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments are designed to increase student achievement and improve college and career readiness. EOC assessments are criterion-referenced tests that measure the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards for specific courses. All assessments are administered via a computer-based testing platform. Question formats include multiple choice and/or fill-in response

items. Tested students include English language learners (ELL) and exceptional student education (ESE) students enrolled in the courses. Accommodations are available for eligible ELL and ESE students.

The first assessment to begin the transition to EOC testing in Florida was the 2011 Algebra 1 EOC Assessment, followed by Biology 1 and Geometry EOC Assessments administered for the first time in spring 2012. Florida's U.S. History EOC Assessment will be administered for the first time in spring 2013 and a Civics EOC Assessment for middle school students will be administered for the first time in spring 2014.

The following EOC assessments are required to receive credit toward graduation from a Florida public high school:

- Algebra 1 EOC Assessment - effective for students entering grade 9 in 2011-2012.
- Geometry EOC Assessment - effective for students entering grade 9 in 2012-2013.
- Biology 1 EOC Assessment - effective for students entering grade 9 in 2012-2013.
- The state will continue to use the Grade 10 FCAT 2.0 Reading as the English/language arts portion of the state's graduation test requirement.

For students in the grade 9 cohort during the first year of a test's administration, scores on the Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 EOC Assessments must be used to calculate 30 percent of students' final grade in the course. For subsequent cohorts, if a student does not pass an EOC assessment, the student must retake it until passing it. According to current Florida Statute, students will not be required to earn a passing score on the U.S. History EOC Assessment in order to earn course credit; instead the 30 percent calculation is retained. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, students must pass the middle grades Civics EOC Assessment in order to be promoted from middle school to high school.

During the first year of implementation, each EOC assessment will only be administered during the spring semester. After the first school year of implementation, each EOC assessment will be administered at the conclusion of both the fall and spring semesters to accommodate courses that conclude at the end of each semester.

Florida EOC assessment results will be reported using scale scores and Achievement Levels. However, the Florida Department of Education cannot establish Achievement Levels until a baseline test administration has occurred. This means that each time an EOC assessment is administered for the first time, the reporting of student assessment results will be limited to scale scores, statewide means, and other normative data. Students receive a score on a scale of 20-80, known as a T-score scale. On this scale, a score of approximately 50 is the statewide average. Score reports will indicate whether students' scores fell within the highest, middle, or lowest level compared to other students in Florida.

Achievement Levels were established for the Algebra 1 EOC Assessment by Florida's State Board of Education in December 2011. Achievement Levels have not yet been established for the Geometry and Biology 1 EOC Assessments since baseline administrations of these two assessments just concluded in May 2012. Achievement Levels for all of Florida's EOC assessments will range from 1 to 5, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 being the highest. The passing score for all EOC assessments will be Achievement Level 3, which indicates satisfactory performance.

Effective July 1, 2012, the State Board of Education's Rule 6.A-1.09941 established uniform procedures relating to the acceptance of transfer work and credit for students entering Florida's public schools. If a

student transfers into a Florida high school from out-of-country, out-of-state, a private school, or a home school, and that student's transcript shows credit received in Algebra 1, Geometry, or Biology 1, the decision as to whether the student must take Florida's EOC Assessment shall be made as follows:

- A transfer student with high school credit in Algebra 1 or Geometry will not take Florida's Algebra 1 EOC Assessment or Geometry EOC Assessment if the student previously passed another statewide, standardized EOC assessment in that course, or if the student achieved a passing score on a statewide assessment in mathematics.
- A transfer student with high school credit in Biology 1 will not take Florida's Biology 1 EOC Assessment if the student previously passed another statewide, standardized Biology EOC assessment.
- A transfer student will take Florida's EOC Assessments in Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 under all other circumstances and must pass the EOC assessment in order to earn credit in the course.

For additional information on Florida's EOC Assessments, visit <http://fcats.fldoe.org/eoc/>.

Summary

As of spring 2012, 22 states administered EOC assessments to all students in associated courses and the Education Commission of the States estimates that this number will increase to 26 states over the next 10 years. The number of EOC exams administered by states ranges from one (New Jersey) to 16 (California). At least seven states require that scores on EOC assessments be used to calculate final course grades and eight states require students to pass EOC assessments in order to graduate from high school. Biology is the subject area assessed by the most states (21 states), followed closely by Algebra (20 states), English (17 states), and History and/or Government (15 states).

States implementing EOC exams have varying guidelines for awarding course credit to students who transfer from out-of-state or private schools. Some states exempt students from taking EOC exams if they have previously passed an EOC course that is equivalent to the course offered at their new school. Others require that students take and pass an EOC exam in order to receive credit for the course at their new school, unless they have previously passed another statewide EOC exam.

In spring 2012, Texas administered its first EOC exams under its new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) program. In an effort to help school districts and states avoid similar difficulties, this report summarized some of the problems encountered by Texas school districts, including: administering EOC exams too early in the school year; resistance from school districts when the state took some control of the grading process away from classroom teachers; and insufficient guidance from the Texas Education Agency regarding the conversion of EOC exam scores into grading requirements and the calculation of grade point average and class rank.

Florida began its transition to EOC assessments with the 2011 Algebra 1 EOC Assessment, followed by Biology 1 and Geometry EOC Assessments administered for the first time in spring 2012. Florida's U.S. History EOC Assessment will be administered for the first time in spring 2013 and a Civics EOC Assessment for middle school students will be administered for the first time in spring 2014. Passing scores on the Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 EOC Assessments will be required for graduation (effective for students entering grade 9 in 2011-2012 for Algebra 1; and effective for students entering grade 9 in 2012-2013 for Geometry and Biology 1). Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, Florida students must pass a middle grades Civics EOC Assessment in order to be promoted from middle school to high school. Scores on the Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 EOC Assessments must count as 30 percent of students' final grade in the course. The passing score for all EOC assessments is Achievement Level 3, which indicates satisfactory performance. Students who transfer into a Florida high school from out-of-country, out-of-state, a private school, or a home school are required to take Florida's Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1 EOC Assessments unless they previously passed another statewide, standardized EOC assessment.

References

- Alexander, K. (2012). Texas House Members Get Earful on State Tests. *Education Week*, 31(36). Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org>.
- Arkansas Department of Education. (2009). *Rules Governing Public School End-of-Course Assessment and Remediation*. Retrieved from http://arkansased.org/about/pdf/current/ade_294_eoc_1009_current.pdf.
- Center on Education Policy. (2011). *State High School Tests: Changes in State Policies and the Impact of the College and Career Readiness Movement*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=385>.
- Domaleski, C. (2011). *State End-of-Course Testing Programs: A Policy Brief*. Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2011/State_End-of-Course_Testing_Programs_2011.pdf.
- Dounay Zinth, J. (2012). *End-of-Course Exams*. Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/01/27/10127.pdf>.
- Georgia Department of Education. (2011). *Student Assessment Handbook 2011-2012*. Retrieved from http://archives.gadoe.org/ci_testing.aspx.
- Indiana Department of Education. (2011). *2011-2012 ISTEP+ Program Manual: Policies and Procedures for Indiana's Assessment System*. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/assessment/2011-12-istep-program-manualoctober-201110-31-11final-kc.pdf>.
- Kappes, H. (2012). School Districts Consider Deferral on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Test. *El Paso Times*, February 28, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_20057025.
- Kentucky Department of Education. (2011). *Frequently Asked Questions: End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments, Edition 1*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.ky.gov>.
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (2010). *North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests at Grades 3-8 and 10*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/eog>.
- Star-Telegram. (2012). *End-of-Course Exams in Texas Schools Raise a Furor*. February 15, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.star-telegram.com>.
- Taylor, M.E., & Oliver, L. (2011). *Tennessee End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment Program*. Tennessee Department of Education, 2011 Tennessee Educational LEADership Conference. Retrieved from http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/doc/LEAD_2011EOCLAQUISHA.pdf.
- Texas Education Agency. (2012). *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Questions and Answers*. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/taar/faq.pdf>.
- Virginia Department of Education. (2011). *Frequently Asked Questions About Earning a Virginia High School Diploma*. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/faq.shtml#four>.

Zabala, D., Minnici, A., McMurrer, J., & Briggs, L. (2008). *State High School Exit Exams 2008 Annual Report: Moving Toward End-of-Course Exams*. Center on Education Policy, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=325>.