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ABSTRACT

On March 4, 1977, the Center for Advanced Study in Education (CASE) of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Board of Education of the City of New York co-sponsored a National Conference on Minimum Competencies: Trends and Issues. Six papers were presented: "An Overview Regarding Minimal Competencies", by Chris Pihlo; "Minimum Competencies: Problems and Opportunities", by Gordon Ambach; "The Dangers of Knowing Precise Answers to the Wrong Questions", by H.A. Wilson; "Item Characteristics and Criteria", by Donald Ross Green; "The Need for Test Security", by Anthony Polemeni; and "What Everyone Should Know About Minimum Competencies", by Richard M. Bossone and Lynn Quitman Troyka. (MV)

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# Proceedings

## The National Conference on Minimum Competencies: Trends and Issues

March 4, 1977

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MINIMUM COMPETENCIES:  
TRENDS AND ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

On March 4, 1977, the Center for Advanced Study in Education (CASE) of the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Board of Education of the City of New York co-sponsored a "National Conference on Minimum Competencies: Trends and Issues." The Conference was held at the CUNY Graduate School, 33 West 42nd Street in New York City and was attended by approximately 120 people from all over the United States, Puerto Rico, and Israel. The Conference Chairman was Dr. Richard M. Bossone, Professor of English of the CUNY Graduate School.

The main purpose of this Conference was to share general information and to exchange ideas about developing guidelines for measures of minimum competencies. Five major speakers presented papers on such topics as legislation, major problems and issues, and testing and measurement strategies; in addition, a forum was held which allowed for people in the audience to ask questions and share their thinking on the variety of complex problems that relate to minimum competencies.

This publication includes: papers; a summation; and appendices which contain materials related to the Conference and to the overall trends and issues regarding minimum competencies.

PART I - AN OVERVIEW

AN OVERVIEW REGARDING MINIMAL COMPETENCIES\*

Chris Pipho  
Education Commission of the States

Proficiency in the basic skills, statewide assessment of minimal competency, tests of minimal competency, minimum achievement level testing or tests of survival skills -- no matter how it is described, legislative and public interest in this issue continues to grow.

Where is the push for state mandates in the basic skills coming from? Public support for educational change has always been difficult to measure, but today the man in the street has not only found a question to his liking but usually is quick to supply the answer: "Schools need to emphasize the basic skills." Equal educational opportunity is considered a noble goal for society as a whole, but parents are really more interested in having the schools bring their children up to grade level in reading, writing and arithmetic before they are promoted to the next grade or graduated from high school. When parents hear about lower test scores and rising school costs, then look at their own child's school performance or the ability of the recent high school or college graduate they just hired, the problems and their recommended solutions take on a sense of personal urgency.

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\* Portions of this Presentation will also appear in the April, 1977 issue of Educational Leadership, published by the Association for Supervision of Curriculum and Development (ASCD).

At the close of 1976, seven states (California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, and Washington) had enacted legislation and another nine states (Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, and Vermont) had taken either state board or state department of education action to mandate some form of minimal competency activity, (See Appendix C). Setting standards for high school graduation or grade-to-grade promotion is the assumed goal of this activity, but as the issue broadens, the specific thrust in some states does not always include a mandate for testing or required standards for high school graduation.

Since January of 1977, ten states (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Kansas, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, and South Carolina) have introduced new minimum competency legislation and one state board of education, Idaho, has approved a new high school graduation policy involving performance standards.

In looking at enacted legislation and adopted state board rulings, it is difficult to find two states that have taken identical action. Even in Florida and California where "early out" competency test ideas were enacted at about the same time, implementation procedures and specifics of the legislation are unique to each state. If action is tied to any trend, it is that many states recognized a similar problem at about the same time and then proceeded to take action in their own unique way. States that usually opt for a strong centralized approach to an issue have enacted rather prescriptive standards for local districts to meet. States which put more emphasis on local control have tended to pass legislation giving guidelines and responsibility to

local boards of education.

The real issue at the state level is the effect of the law or ruling on the school programs and individual students. As one state department of education official said: "It really depends if you want to enforce arbitrary cut-off scores which will penalize kids or if you want to put together a program that will assure each student a better education." This point was made by a state trying to encourage local districts to identify learning deficiencies early and then offer remedial instruction. It is equally as interesting to hear a legislator or educator from another state argue for a strong centralized program of testing as the best means of helping individual students. While the wave of legislation does look like a single trend nationwide, at the state level it more closely represents a trellis with forces and counter-forces all trying to make changes while the existing governance and political structures continue to grow or just hold onto the status quo.

After following the movement for the past eighteen months by reading minimum competency legislation and talking with hundreds of people working on implementation procedures, it is evident that states are beginning to be more selective about the issues they wish to incorporate into legislation. Legislators and educators are asking more questions and studying alternatives before taking action. For example, in Florida in the 1976 legislative session, the issue of what happens to students leaving high school early or, for that matter, what options are available to those students, was one of the central reasons for amending the 1975 legislation.

In Connecticut in the 1976 session, three separate bills were introduced by the joint education committee in order to bring out a thorough



discussion of compulsory attendance laws, testing programs and alternative school models. Technically, none of the bills was implemented but they did serve as a "study vehicle" for legislation planned for 1977. To this extent, failed legislation in Connecticut and other states tend to serve as a barometer of the political give and take process evolving within a state. Studying failed or enacted legislation does not allow one to predict what states will do during this legislative session but does give one a taxonomy of questions which elicit a broader discussion of issues and hopefully assists in producing better state actions.

The following list of questions is emerging from the people who are implementing minimal competency programs:

#### Minimum Proficiency Skills

1. Who determines what the minimum skills should be?
2. How will these minimal skills be validated in the academic and work world?
3. If agreement on minimal skills is not possible, will unanimity be achieved by agreeing to reduced minimal standards, i.e.: to make minimal more minimal until it becomes meaningless?
4. Can both parents and educators agree on minimal standards of performance criteria which can be translated into a sequential learning program for mastery teaching?
5. Will statewide minimal competency standards eventually produce national goals for education, thereby reducing control over education?

#### Testing

1. Will the schools test academic achievement of the basic skills

- with achievement tests only or will applied performance tests be used, i.e.: filling out a job application, applying the minimal skills to some sort of a problem solving issue?
2. How will minimal competency testing replace or supplement existing statewide assessment procedures?
  3. Why cannot state assessment programs be used for minimal competency achievement purposes?
  4. Can testing terminology such as criterion-referenced, domain-referenced, and objective-referenced be understood by both the parent and the educator so that everyone knows that all forms of testing contain an element of subjective opinion?
  5. Will the use of learning hierarchies, prerequisite skills, and elaborate testing programs create a school learning environment based on minimal standards at minimal speed? What about excellence?
  6. Will the fear of passing students who have not mastered minimal skills or the fear of not passing those who actually have attained minimal skills produce a risk-free teaching environment?
  7. If the school guarantees achievement standards for all graduates and these students fail to perform on a job later in life will the schools be open for a round of second generation "Peter Doe" type court cases?

#### Finance

1. Should the state finance, and the schools teach, only agreed to minimal skills? What about maximal skills?
2. What provisions will need to be made in the state

formula for remedial classes and students staying in school longer to meet the minimal skill levels?

3. If a state equalization finance formula includes payment differentials for different pay grade levels, how will these need to be altered if large blocks of students stay in a given grade level?
4. What are the financial implications of the "early out" test? Will states pay for the full year of education for students if they are in school or will students move so silently from high school to community colleges that the state could be paying for their education twice in one year?
5. How many levels of achievement or kinds of school programs can a state finance or a district afford to offer? Will the local district decide program offerings or will the minimum competency standards dictate this from the state level?

#### Students

1. What happens to students not achieving the minimum standards? How long will the school keep these people enrolled?
2. At what age should students have the option to leave school? Can students leave without parent permission if they have passed the minimal competency standards?
3. What options are available to students who pass the minimal competency test and wish to leave school early? Are jobs available? Will the community college or university accept the student at any time during the year or at any age?
4. Will students be labeled early in their school career and kept

out of vocational or college bound programs? What about the slow student or the late bloomer?

#### Staff

1. Will minimal competency standards create a disincentive for school districts? -- i.e.: too many early out students, too early or too many staying longer in the year could mean lost revenue -- would the negotiated teacher agreements need to include automatic midyear decreases in teaching staff and support personnel assigned to each building?
2. Will the education program suffer under minimal competency standards? How will schools plan curricular offerings if they do not know how many students will stay in school for the whole year, or how many will stay at a grade level longer than a year?
3. What will happen if large numbers of students pass the "early out" test, but decide to stay in school using the test score as a threat over the teachers and administrators saying "keep me happy or I will leave"?

The search for meaning in the enacted and failed legislation and state board rulings is at best fraught with pitfalls and uncertainties. One could argue that the public call for academic performance standards for grade-to-grade promotion or high school graduation only mirrors societal problems of which the school is a part, but, nonetheless, parents have issued a clear call. To ignore it or to give only a weak expression of concern with no honest action, is likely to create an even greater backlash of public concern.

On the other hand, a state that moves too quickly or ineptly may create a chain of events which could have the public calling for the total local control of schools or total federal control of schools. The situation cannot be compared to a pendulum with fortune swinging towards or away from the "righteous," but rather compared to a spiral which overlaps upward building on successes and failures of the past, giving both educators and legislators an opportunity in America's 201st year to reinterpret the American dream -- education for all.

MINIMUM COMPETENCIES: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Gordon M. Ambach  
Executive Deputy Commissioner  
New York State Education Department

A discussion of minimum competencies is always timely because it deals with the fundamental questions of the purposes of education. This conference is particularly timely because of developments across the country in establishing new techniques and procedures for determining minimum competencies and their measurement. My part of the program is to review some of the problems and issues and, I add, opportunities in establishing minimum competencies and in assessing whether they have been achieved.

If one starts with a definition of education as learning to be competent, it follows that there would be minimum competencies to be obtained if one were to be claimed "educated." At the graduation each year at Harvard University, after conferring the baccalaureate degrees, the President says to the graduates, "Welcome to the company of educated persons." Of course, what he really means is welcome to the company of everyone else who has received a baccalaureate degree from Harvard. The faculty has concluded that each graduate should join that company.

Conventional wisdom is that a person is competent in a particular endeavor or subject when the teacher declares that person competent. This may be done on an examination or series of examinations, on the basis of discussion, papers or other evidence in the teacher's judgment. Conventional wisdom has been that schools rely on the judgment of the several teachers and school districts rely on the judgments of the several schools to declare competence at a particular level.

With all that conventional wisdom, why the proliferation of tests and tests which measure or compare competence among schools, across school district lines, across state lines and in some cases across national boundaries? The answer is: where responsibility and power for education resource allocation is lodged, there will be a demand to know results.

The public is looking for better educational indicators just as it wants better health indicators, welfare indicators, crime indicators or economic indicators. During the 1950's and 1960's, the educational focus was almost entirely on the growth of the student population and accommodation of that population in a universal education system. The focus has shifted to consideration of a decline in enrollment, an increase in expenditures, apparently a decline in performance as indicated by some tests, and a general feeling that educational productivity has slipped. People are uptight, and behind them there are uptight organizations and those who control the public purse who are more and more interested in "how well education is doing." During a time of declining resources, the additional question is, "Are we doing the most important things and doing them well?"

A second phenomenon contributing to the interest in minimum competencies and particularly the testing of minimum competencies is a greater acceptance of testing procedures. The use of high school equivalency examinations, college proficiency examinations, and external degrees by examination is part of a change in accepting test results as credentials of competence no matter what course of study or formal educational program the individual has completed. A display of results

rather than process is stimulating implementation of minimum competency programs.

In my view, it is essential to have sound educational indicators for public display of the results of education. Such indicators in programs for measuring minimum competency must not be limited only to that which can be quantified. We cannot simply rationalize what can be made rational. We cannot test just what can be tested and be satisfied that the total purpose of education and the total result has been measured. We can talk about Johnnie reading at the third grade level or doing arithmetic at the fourth grade level. When did you last hear someone describe Johnnie painting at the sixth grade level or singing at the second grade level or doing situps at the third grade level? The latter cannot be ignored simply because the instruments to measure them are cumbersome.

This morning you have had a succinct overview of actions on minimum competencies in several states. Let me focus on New York State, not because our solutions may be the best, but to sharpen the issues of implementing a program of minimum competencies since the previous presentation noted new developments both through legislation and by state board action. In New York State, all of the actions on developing minimum competence examinations have been taken by the Board of Regents, not by the Legislature.

#### What Makes Sense in a Program of Minimum Competencies?

In New York State, a program for establishing minimum competencies has been in place for more than 100 years. It is called the Regents



examinations. Back in 1865, these examinations were established to control admission to the academies and, in fact, the results of examinations determined the distribution of State aid to the academies from the so-called "Literature Fund." Aid was provided on the basis of the number of students who passed the examinations. Starting in 1877, new Regents examinations were used to "furnish a suitable standard of graduation" from the academies. In 1904, these examinations were extended to cover all secondary schools. The hallmark of these examinations has always been that they have been developed by the teachers of the subjects tested; they have been graded in the local school districts, with a sampling check by the State Education Department; they have led to the award of Regents credentials known as the Regents diploma; and the exams have always been considered only a part of the school's evaluation of the student. Local school districts could impose requirements beyond those basically established in the Regents examinations in order to determine graduation.

By 1969, there were forty-eight different subjects in which Regents examinations were offered. These included not only the academic subjects but also vocational education and general education subjects. Since that time, there has been a reduction in the subjects covered to approximately twenty-five. These exams are achievement tests; they are based on the requirements in the New York State courses of study; they generally provide a good prognostic index of educational success; and they have provided a uniform state standard for students no matter what the local school district.

The Regents examinations have always had two purposes. One was a

determination of an individual student's competence in the subjects examined, and the second was the use as a measure of a local school district performance: that is, a check on the aggregate student performance in one local district compared to the performance of students in other districts.

Since 1965, New York State has implemented the Pupil Evaluation Program with testing in reading and arithmetic at the third, sixth, and ninth grade levels. Within the past two years, we have established the series of five basic competency tests which, effective in 1979 and 1980, all students in the state are required to pass before graduation from secondary school. Even though New York State has had this long history in the testing/evaluation area and we have recently begun implementing basic competency tests, we acknowledge the importance of continual review and refinement.

In the next two sections, I would like to describe some of the issues and problems which must be addressed in establishing a program of basic competency tests.

#### Selecting the Purpose for Minimum Competency Tests

There are at least six different possible purposes which such tests can serve.

The first is to ensure that pupils who graduate are able to perform some minimal set of skills before graduating. The tests provide a form of certification for the student. This provides assurance to employers and others interested in each individual. It also provides an indicator of whether or not the school is meeting the obligation to the student by

assuring that every child possesses certain minimum competencies before leaving. Several recent court cases in which students are suing boards of education come to mind.

A second purpose is to allow students to leave secondary school early if they can show that they are able to perform at a predetermined level.

A third purpose is to ensure that promotion from one grade or level to another is based on proof that students have mastered prespecified levels of performance.

A fourth purpose is to offer credit to students who can show that they are able to perform at predetermined levels without going through traditional courses.

A fifth purpose is to identify students not performing at minimum levels and to require school districts to provide compensatory programs for those students.

A sixth purpose is to use the results of tests for the distribution of state or local aid among school districts or among schools so that, for example, the aid might be directed toward the units with poorest performance and presumably most in need of special assistance.

The primary purpose of New York State's basic competency testing program is to ensure that pupils who graduate are able to perform some minimal set of adult skills before graduating. The program has a secondary purpose. The tests are given as early as the ninth grade so that districts can have time to provide compensatory programs for students not performing competently.

Let me suggest the issues and problems which accompany the choice

made among the purposes listed above.

Issues and Problems Associated with Establishing Minimum Standards  
for Graduation

1. Are minimum standards defined as competencies required to function as an adult or as minimum standards of competence based on the curriculum in place in the state or the locality? In New York State, we have opted to use adult standards. Nevertheless, these adult standards have been set primarily by drawing from traditional subject areas. We have not defined systematically the life skills needed by an individual and then built our testing program based on that comprehensive examination of life skills. We have taken the practical approach of working with certain subject areas and tried to determine a minimum set of adult competencies related to skills in those subject areas: Reading, Mathematics, Writing or Composition, Practical Sciences and Health and Civics and Citizenship. This selection by no means guarantees that an individual student who has these skills will be prepared to function effectively as an adult. For example, there is no certainty that individuals who pass these exams will be employable. This battery of tests has limited coverage. The attempt, however, is to test competencies needed by adults.

2. Are the minimum standards set properly? Is the information that a student is above minimum adequate? The basic competency tests in New York State define only minimum sets of standards. We have a research and development program under way with support from the Carnegie Corporation to develop a test which will ultimately provide a continuum of competency levels in reading comprehension. We will be able in the future to indicate to a perspective employer, for example,

an individual's level of reading competency. At present, the tests simply measure whether a person is "competent" or not. The tests do not indicate "how" competently one performs.

3. Only certain areas or subject matters are being tested because of the "state of the art" problems in testing. This is a major limitation and affects the public understanding of minimum competencies. The tendency is to judge the education system on what is tested.

4. The curriculum in most school districts is not directly related to adult competencies. To a certain degree the tests are unfair since students have not necessarily been exposed to what is being tested on the tests, for example filling in income tax forms.

5. Adoption of adult standards which may be relatively easy can have an adverse impact on the entire school program. If the minimum standard becomes the accepted level, compensatory programs at the secondary level may be cut out because so many students are deemed "competent." This may be happening in New York State and is a drawback to the testing program. If we choose to make adult standards more difficult, the definition of minimal competencies may well extend beyond capacities really needed to function. Resolution of this issue requires an extensive research effort to identify systematically competencies needed for major adult roles. One possible way of resolving this problem without doing such a study is to use curriculum standards rather than adult standards as the basis for minimum competency testing. This, however, results in another set of problems.

If curriculum standards are used, they are not likely to have face validity for those who have been calling for the development of adult

competence standards. Curriculum standards are oriented to current disciplines and the connection between these standards and adult competencies is not clear. It is more difficult to justify standards not related to a defined set of needed competencies. I note that in the field of examination for employment, the courts are ruling consistently against the use of standards that cannot be linked to job skills.

6. Is the testing program voluntary or compulsory? In New York State, we have decided to make the testing program compulsory. A student must pass each of the five exams to earn a diploma.

7. What happens if students continue to fail? Should the state force school districts to substitute remedial instruction for the regular program, or should the students be required to complete the regular program and receive outside assistance to assist them in passing the test? If this latter alternative is selected, additional funding will be required.

8. What test arrangements are made for the handicapped child who may not be able to provide the responses called for in the testing format? A school district may exempt a child in special education, but no diploma can be awarded. New York State is providing examinations in Braille and large type for those with sight deficiencies. In general, in New York State, if a child needs basic supplementary assistance to proceed in the regular school program, those same supplements would be used in testing. There are complex problems of determining test application to children with disabilities such as dyslexia. The New York State Regents are still reviewing these issues.

9. Must competence be displayed in the English language? The

New York State response on this issue is that all competency exams are offered only in English.

10. Is the test to be statewide or locally developed? A decision giving the localities responsibility for establishing a testing program means that a state must establish monitoring procedures. If, on the other hand, statewide standards are adopted, localities feel their responsibilities have been preempted. As I indicated earlier, results must be known at the levels of resource allocation. New York State has traditionally had statewide competency tests and will continue to do so.

Just as the state has need for evidence of competence, so does each local district. Ideally both might work from exactly the same instruments and, thereby, achieve greater efficiency. Basic competency exams in New York State are not designed for diagnostic purposes or for instructional management systems which use detailed objectives and criterion-referenced tests. Where local districts need these instruments, minimum competence tests will be additional. Where both local and state testing objectives are the same, so ought to be the instruments.

In summary, I have indicated that testing competencies and minimum competencies are not a brand new issue in New York State. Such testing has been under way for more than a century. There are, however, new purposes to be served by new minimum competency tests. I have described the choices made by the Board of Regents and indicated the problems that have been addressed in implementing these decisions. I have focused on the practical problems here because they are the same problems that must be addressed by any state. We hope that the decisions made in New York have been competent.

PART II - CURRENT TESTING AND MEASUREMENT STRATEGIES



## THE DANGERS OF KNOWING PRECISE ANSWERS TO THE WRONG QUESTIONS

H. A. Wilson

Education Commission of the States

The discussion in this paper will proceed from three assumptions:

(1) minimal competency objectives are measurement rather than instructional objectives; (2) tests will be constructed to measure attainment on minimal competency objectives; (3) decisions will be made on the basis of performance on tests of minimal competency that will seriously affect the lives of individual students.

The last assumption, the effect on the lives of individual students, must cause those of us involved in test development to pause and reflect seriously on the challenge we face. The effects on student lives and careers may vary somewhat depending on the purpose of the test but the most direct potential effects will be negative. The student who does not achieve a passing score will be denied a regular high school diploma, or denied credit for a particular course, or will not be promoted to the next higher grade level. In no case will performance on the test alone produce the positive effect of receiving a diploma, credit, or promotion. In all cases, positive effects will be contingent on many other factors in addition to a passing score. The potential negative effects, however, will be the direct result of the test, and only of the test.

The responsibility test makers must face when constructing tests with such direct potential for aversive effects on students is further complicated by the unique problems of constructing a test of absolute rather than relative achievement. The need for absolute rather than relative measures implied by the term "minimal competencies" emphasizes

the necessity for being as clear and precise as possible about the question being asked when we administer the test.

Let me illustrate the confusion surrounding the underlying question with an objective that is often found in legislation and regulations concerning minimal competency. Minimal competency is often defined in legislation as performance at some specified grade level on some standardized test of achievement in a particular subject matter (e.g., a sixth grade level in reading or an eighth grade level in mathematics). Such a definition or objective is imbued with a certain naive logic. To the layman, it may seem very reasonable to expect that after twelve years of schooling a graduating senior should read at least at the level of the average sixth grader. Indeed, it might be a reasonable objective if we had a precise specification of what an average sixth grader can read. Unfortunately, we do not have such a complete and precise specification of "sixth grade reading." Grade level equivalents are simply another term for percentile levels on a norming distribution. In fact, a sixth grade reading level in this context means only that a high school senior is in the bottom fifth to tenth percentile of the distribution of scores of high school seniors in reading achievement.

A minimal competency objective stated in terms of grade level equivalence will have the effect of guaranteeing that some known percent of high school seniors will not receive a standard diploma. If the educational system is viewed as a social screening device, then such a criterion is probably quite useful. We have only to set our minimum grade level equivalents either higher or lower to screen out whatever percent of the population we deem desirable or undesirable. Given the high predictive validity achievable with modern test theory, a Swiftian economy might be effected by

administering a battery of tests to incoming first graders, dropping the bottom xth percent from the educational system and getting on about our business. A great deal of public money and student agony would be saved by such a procedure.

Obviously the above suggestion is not advanced seriously. It is meant only to highlight the damage that can be done when we bring to bear all of the precision inherent in modern test theory to answer the wrong question. The question of where a student falls in a norming distribution is obviously not the question intended by minimal competency legislation. But how do we go about defining the real question that we want to answer with a minimal competency test? That is exactly the role of objective development: to make explicit and unambiguous the questions to be answered by performance on test items. It is not an easy task, nor one that is completely understood. In the remainder of this paper I will outline the procedures followed at National Assessment in objective development and point out special problems when applying those procedures to the area of minimal competency.

#### National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Objectives Development

The development of objectives to guide and focus the construction of exercises or test items, the first step in any test or assessment activity, probably receives more attention at National Assessment than is common practice in other test construction projects. National Assessment's focus on obtaining data on what students know and can do in a given subject area rather than placing an individual student on some continuum implies that we must be as sure as possible that we identify the knowledge, attitudes and performance that are most important on a national rather than a regional or local basis. At National Assessment it is important that we

include and measure objectives that are expected to be achieved by all students within a given age class, as well as some objectives that are extremely difficult but still important for some small segment of the student population. These objectives in standardized tests would typically not be measured because they contribute little or nothing to the discrimination power of the test.

From the beginning of National Assessment, over ten years ago, a model of objectives development has been followed that has remained basically the same. The general method is not unique to National Assessment. What may be unique is the intensity and level of detail that is pursued at NAEP within the broad outlines of the model. The model has to do with the kinds of consultants who work on the objectives and the tasks set for the consultants. Three categories of consultants are used throughout the objectives-development phase. First and most obvious, of course, are the educators. These include state and local curriculum specialists, classroom teachers, and educational administrators. It is the task of the educators to identify those objectives that reflect important knowledge and skills for students at a given age level, and for which at least some responsibility is currently recognized in the public school system. A second category of consultants are the university research scholars in a subject area who are not directly involved in public school education. It is the task of the research scholars to examine the objectives as developed by the educators and to be sure that those objectives accurately reflect current scholarship in the field.

The third group of consultants, the laymen, is one that is somewhat unique to the National Assessment. We again divide the lay consultants

into three subcategories. First, we have the laymen who are experts within a subject area but not involved in either public school education or in university teaching or research. For example, a mathematician at Lockheed would be considered a layman in our context although certainly not a layman in mathematics. The second subgroup of laymen are those who are connected with education through some type of elective or appointive capacity, for example, local and state school board members and members of state and federal legislative committees concerned with education. The third subcategory of laymen are the interested and concerned citizens not included in the two previous categories. The third category may be exemplified by members of the educational committees of the AFL-CIO, NAACP, League of Women Voters, etc. The task for the lay consultants is to examine the objectives developed by the educators and the scholars and to identify those objectives that are felt to be most important from the standpoint of the general society. The lay consultants do not merely examine objectives and rank them by importance but also make major contributions to objectives that were perhaps overlooked by the previous two groups. The most dramatic example of that activity was in the field of the writing assessment. The scholars and educators in their objectives development paid little or no attention to the problems of mechanics, spelling, punctuation, etc. When the lay group met to examine the objectives, they felt that the mechanics aspects of writing were of high importance for prospective employers and for society in general. As a result of their discussion, a special aspect of the writing that looked at mechanics was incorporated in the objectives. The three categories of consultants meet in a series of conferences extend-

ing over nine to twelve months during the objectives development phase. Between conferences, drafts of objectives developed at one conference are circulated for revision by members of that conference and then passed on to the succeeding conferences. This is a time consuming and expensive process, but one that we feel is vital to the mission of National Assessment to measure and report on those aspects of education that are acknowledged as important through a national consensus.

From the beginning, National Assessment has attempted to find some compromise position between the global philosophical objectives found in many state and local curriculum guides and the other extreme of endless and voluminous listings of behavioral objectives. That compromise ground must be clear cut enough to give guidance to the writing of exercises and yet not lose sight of the forest by examining every tree as is sometimes the case in long lists of behavioral objectives. I do not claim that we have in every case been totally successful in finding this compromise.

Another problem that National Assessment has faced is the revision of objectives from one cycle of assessment to the next. Since National Assessment's major task is to measure and report change in achievement over time, it is necessary that the objectives to be measured do not swing too violently from one pole to another between assessment cycles. On the other hand, it is also important to keep abreast of the real changes in education that may occur over five to ten years. A method of addressing that problem that we have found to be very effective is to place the objectives development effort within the framework of a two dimensional matrix with subject matter content on one dimension and student behavior on the other. This, of course, is a format that has been used for many years in standardized

test development and is called a Table of Specifications.

There are many ways to organize the contents dimension. No one way is best. The major task for the objectives developer is to bring the consultants to an agreement on an organizational scheme that makes sense educationally and that can serve as a guide for summarizing results for future reports. Each of the major topics within a subject area is broken down into a number of subtopics and each of those subtopics in turn may be broken down into a large number of third level details. In many cases that third level of detail can be further defined at a fourth and fifth level. If the matrix is being used to define the subject area or to define the domain in some operational sense, the classification and subclassification of the subject matter dimension can go on to nearly endless lengths. In actual practice, however, as used for developing measurement objectives, value judgments must be made early on as to the relative importance of the various categories and subcategories. An actual test is severely constrained by the testing time available. If this constraint is known from the outset, as it is now at National Assessment, it becomes quickly apparent what level of categorization can be reported overall and at what level of subcategorization one must begin sampling rather than exhaustive testing.

On the behavioral dimension, we have relied heavily on the taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive and affective domain as developed by Bloom and his colleagues. We have made no attempt to address the question of whether or not the taxonomy is truly hierarchical but rather we use the taxonomy, or some adaptation of it to order our thinking as to the behaviors that we will attempt to elicit in the exercises for the

particular subject matter as defined by the subject matter dimension. Not all cells created by the cross of behavior and subject matter will be filled. Some are blank because of the relative unimportance of particular behaviors, in particular subcategories of the subject matter. Others are blank because the state of the art of measurement at the present time precludes measurement in any definitive way.

#### Special Problems of Applying the Model to Minimal Competency Objectives

One of the major strengths of the NAEP model that may be applied to the development of minimal competency objectives is the use of a wide variety and large numbers of consultants. It must be clear after a moment's reflection that since the whole notion of minimal competency stems from a widespread public concern for educational outcomes, the objectives to be measured by minimal competency tests must not be left solely to the judgment of professional educators. The general public either at the national, state or local level must be heavily involved. By the same token, the judgment and experience of our public school educators must also make a heavy contribution to objectives development.

One group of consultants that is important to the National Assessment may be of relatively less importance for minimal competency objectives. That is the group of research scholars. By definition, minimal competency objectives probably will not run much danger of straying from current scholarly thought and sanction.

When developing minimal competency objectives, the obvious first question that must be asked is: Minimal competency in what subject areas? It is fairly clear from the language of enacted or proposed legislation that minimal competency for high school graduation must at



least address the areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Other subject matter areas have been suggested in some instances: for example, social studies and science as well as the broader basic life skills. The point at issue in the present discussion is not the selection of areas to be measured. The issue that we as test makers must address is to find a method of objectives development that will result in a complete definition and specification of the content of a given area.

Let us turn now from the problems of subject matter definition to a consideration of behaviors that we identify as necessary to exhibit minimal competency. The Bloom taxonomy is generally broken into two broad divisions of cognitive and affective behaviors. In a test of minimal competency, the affective or attitudinal domain may be properly ignored. The term minimal competency is in a real sense another way of saying minimal standards. To apply minimal standards to attitudinal problems goes against the basic philosophical tenets of a free society. To require that a person has the "proper attitude" before being awarded a high school diploma implies both indoctrinization and an invasion of privacy. We can, however, quite properly set minimal standards for competency in the domain of cognitive behaviors.

The cognitive domain is divided into two major categories:

(1) knowledge and (2) intellectual skills and abilities. In a strict sense, the term "behaviors" does not apply to either category. Knowledge and its subsections in the taxonomy are a classification of types of things that can be known. When these categories of knowledge are combined with subject matter topics, problems and situations are produced that will elicit the behaviors of recall or recognition. On the other hand, the category of intellectual skills and abilities provides a set of terms

that are more easily accepted as descriptors of behavior at least in the intellectual if not the physical sense. With these distinctions in mind, the term "behaviors" is used in this paper to refer to the full cognitive taxonomy.

In the cognitive area, the first category addressed is that of knowledge. Unfortunately, the consideration of knowledge is often confined to knowledge of terminology or knowledge of specific facts, with other aspects of knowledge receiving little or no attention. By other subcategories of knowledge, I refer to knowledge of conventions, knowledge of trends and sequences, classifications and categories, criteria and methodology. I also refer to knowledge of principles and generalizations and of theories and structures. Each of those subcategories of knowledge has varying degrees of applicability when considering minimal competencies. Knowledge of conventions is certainly an aspect since functioning in any society is greatly impaired if the conventions are unknown; for instance, the ordering of the alphabet, the shapes of traffic signs, driving on the right hand side of the road, capitalization, spelling and punctuation are all conventions in our society. At the other end of the spectrum, knowledge of theories and structures may well fall beyond the limits of minimal competency.

The general overemphasis on knowledge of specific facts has brought the knowledge dimension into ill-repute amongst educators. However, some specific facts may well be worth knowing and are necessary for functioning in modern society. For example, the specific fact that each state is represented by two senators in the United States Congress is a specific fact that has some utility for voters. In a recent national

assessment of citizenship, however, that fact was not known by nearly half of the nation's 17-year-olds.

Behaviors classified as comprehension certainly must form a major part of minimal competency objectives. Whether or not one thinks of comprehension in the usual terms discussed by reading teachers, that is, literal and inferential comprehension or in terms of the Bloom taxonomy (i.e., translation, interpretation and extrapolation), it is clear that comprehension of written and verbal messages as well as charts and diagrams is a necessary aspect of minimal competency in any subject matter area. Whether or not extrapolation and inference are competencies that must be addressed in a set of minimal competency objectives is a point that must be decided by those who are developing the objectives based on their internalized definition of what is minimal.

The category of behaviors classified as application are likely to be heavily represented in minimal competency objectives. Knowledge, whether it be of specific facts or of theories of structures, is of little value if it cannot be applied to new and unique situations. The problem in this area is to define the level of application that might be considered minimally acceptable. Application of knowledge and skills in life-like situations will probably far outweigh application in more academic settings.

Two of the remaining higher order cognitive categories, analysis and evaluation, are likely to be passed over if the consultant's attention is not drawn directly to them. Even at the level of minimal competency, behaviors classified as analysis and evaluation are important in critical reading or listening. The descriptions of behaviors under

analysis and evaluation as in most other areas of the taxonomy are couched in highly academic terms. However, they are directly applicable to advertising messages, newspaper stories and a wide variety of written material and television programming.

Synthesis, the last category of cognitive abilities, is most directly applicable to the area of writing. Synthesis is defined as the production of a unique communication, a proposed set of operations, or the derivation of a set of abstract relationships. The latter subcategory is clearly beyond the limits of minimal competency. However, the first two subcategories, production of a unique communication and production of a plan or proposed set of operations, can certainly be applied to most subject matter at some level.

Careful and extensive categorization of subject matter topics crossed with equally careful definitions and categorizations of behavior to be elicited, if carried to its logical conclusion, will produce an operational definition of a domain to be tested. Obviously, a test constructed of items measuring each of the finest non-blank cells of such a matrix will far exceed any practical boundaries of resources available for production or administration. There are, however, methods of sampling from such a domain that are well known. The problem is not in sampling but in specifying the domain.

Three problems need to be addressed if we are serious about defining and specifying a domain of minimal competency in any subject area. Two of them are essentially tedious and the third is more profound. First, we need to develop a more ordered, rule-governed and systematic way of categorizing and subcategorizing the elements of the subject matter

itself. We need some method that will guide us to some optimal depth of finer and finer classifications. Present methods dictate a stopping point based on limitations of time, patience and money. That is not a scientific or logical method. There must be a point of diminishing return that can be defined logically. No doubt that point or depth will vary depending on the nature of the initial broad category. But how does it vary? What is the relationship?

The second problem may be a little more tractable. The current definitions of taxonomic categories of behavior, while excellent in a general way, are much too general for purposes of domain specification. The need is for something more precise than the present suggestive instances. What is required are sets of specific statements about behavior related to stimuli drawn from subject matter categories. Such sets or lists might be long, but certainly not endless when filtered through some definition of minimal competency.

The third and most important problem relates in part to the two problems just discussed, but also has aspects independent of other considerations. Essentially it is the problem of defining the complexity of the tasks represented by an objective. We need a method or set of methods that will provide an a priori scaling of difficulty and complexity of both stimuli and responses on logical or psychological grounds. We need to be able to scale written and verbal messages on the basis of ideational density, levels of abstraction and logical consistency. We need to define levels of inference and extrapolation. We need to know what we mean by the terms "depth of analysis," and "literal comprehension." We must find acceptable methods for scaling or classi-

fyng levels of difficulty. Without such methods we are missing a vital dimension of our specifications -- the dimension that clarifies the meaning of minimal competency.

We are not totally without resources to attack the problem of a priori scaling. For example, readability formulae exist that do an efficient job of scaling reading passages. Recent work has been done at the New York State Education Department on a multiple choice cloze technique that may define the meaning of literal comprehension. We can also choose from a variety of scaling techniques when specifying arithmetic operations. Much work remains to be done, however, in the areas of inference, analysis and application.

The essential task of objectives development, as presented in this discussion, is to produce a complete and detailed specification of a subject matter domain. We have found that task to be best accomplished by the use of a variety of consultants in working out a detailed matrix of content and behaviors. In the case of minimal competency objectives, a third dimension must be added that specifies the complexity of the tasks implied by the first two dimensions. Objectives development in this sense is an expensive and time consuming task, but given the potential impact that minimal competency tests may have on the lives of young people, we cannot afford to do less.

## ITEM CHARACTERISTICS AND CRITERIA

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This paper concerns the characteristics and content of tests of minimum competencies and how such tests differ from other achievement tests. Such tests are the best means available to schools to meet certain expectations of society: (1) that students who are labelled high school graduates can at least read, write, and do arithmetic; (2) that the schools are doing all they can to get students to this point; (3) that school administrators know how well the schools are succeeding and that they can and should report this information to their school boards and the public.

Only tests with certain characteristics can perform these functions, and these characteristics are not those found in most current achievement tests. The nature of a test is determined by its items. The purposes the test is intended to serve determine what the characteristics of the items should be, while the definition of what the test is to measure determines the item content. Content and use should be considered separately even though they affect each other in ways that will become apparent.

Take a single test item from each of several kinds of achievement tests serving different purposes. Examine these items without reference to the test from which they are drawn. How do they differ? Their format may or may not be different; their differences, if any, in content (i.e., in what they ask) may be reasonably obvious; but beyond this it is much

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harder to go. If content and format do not tell, most people would not be able to say with any substantial certainty from which test the items come. I might add it is equally difficult to tell by inspection which items within a single test are the most effective, once the blatantly bad ones have been eliminated. In either case, within tests or between them, there are usually differences among items in the way they work and thus in the role they play in a test. To examine these differences requires data. The information needed concerns what people do when responding to the items such as: How many get this item right? Are there group differences on this item? What wrong answers are most commonly chosen? How does performance on one item relate to the performances on other items? These are the concerns in the item analyses ordinarily done during the construction of a standardized test.

Thus, we can compare and contrast items with respect to both their content and statistical characteristics. Although format can on occasion be very important, it will not be discussed here. Also, for simplicity, this discussion will concern only tests that are objectively scorable: paper and pencil group tests. Finally, let us assume that everybody recognizes that these tests must be standardized, i.e., standardized conditions of administration have to be developed and used if they are to serve any of their possible uses.

The key point in this discussion is the differences in the purposes of the tests. Differences in test items being considered arise because of differences in purpose. The purposes of a measure of minimum competence are (1) to determine which students are qualified to graduate, (2) to provide information about what things students need to learn to be



qualified to graduate, (3) to assess how well the school or school system is doing its job in preparing students to graduate (or to be turned loose from school, if you prefer). All three of these purposes should be served by any minimum competency test. For a variety of practical reasons, one test should serve all purposes. Theoretically there might be an advantage in having three separate tests. However, they might yield somewhat inconsistent results, thus destroying their credibility which is plainly a high priority goal of any such program. Asking students to take three tests where one might do is but another of the many objections one can foresee. Therefore, it will be postulated here that one test to serve all three functions is needed.

It is necessary, however, to consider what kinds of items are needed for each purpose and how differences in purposes may lead to different item criteria; it should become evident that the different purposes lead to different sorts of items, and from this it follows that designing multipurpose tests requires compromises with the ideal for any one of them.

Let us take the first purpose of a minimum competency test: to classify students as meeting or not meeting the minimum standard of competency set in some particular area, such as reading. If one were constructing a test with this as its sole purpose, then the ideal item would be one that was most likely to be answered correctly by someone above the standard and incorrectly by someone below. A measure of how well an item does this is called its discrimination index which is usually highest at the point in the scale being measured where the item difficulty is 50%, i.e., where half the people scoring at that point pass it and the other

half fail it. Ideally, to establish this requires an empirical tryout study using nontest data. One might, for example, identify a large number of individuals who just met and others who just failed to meet the standard, a standard probably based on the collective judgment of a number of people who had observed these individuals functioning in natural settings. Then the items of the prospective test would be given to these individuals and the resulting test made up of those items which discriminated well.

Two difficulties arise immediately. First is the problem of identifying such individuals. I seriously doubt that anyone will succeed in executing such a study. Who, after all, is competent to make such decisions about large numbers of real people? No one person. Only after many people of various sorts have collected and sifted the evidence on any given individual would such a judgment be justified. Costs and competence both militate against this study. Ideal, it is; practical, it is not. The second difficulty is that a test designed for the purpose of discrimination alone should consist entirely of items which measure this narrow difference. The more closely related the items are to each other, the better. The test would seem extremely hard to those below and extremely easy for those above the standard. For this purpose, great precision is desirable because misclassifying someone would be a serious error. Since test reliability is largely dependent on the number of items, as many items as possible are needed. It immediately follows that such a test could not serve either of the other two necessary purposes well, if at all, because their requirements are so different.

The second purpose of a minimum competency test is to diagnose. The

diagnostic function requires that the test measure separately, with reasonable reliability, each of the various components and prerequisites of the competency. This has substantial implications for content -- a point to be considered shortly -- but also requires somewhat different item characteristics. Specifically, it is desirable to be able to measure levels of skill of the various components well below the competency point in order to help the teacher find the right starting point. Consider the fact that if you are dealing with students who have fallen short after eight, ten or twelve years of school, nothing is more unproductive and doomed to failure than to put them to doing things they already know on the one hand or, even worse, doing things they are not ready to learn. The right starting point is essential so that real and visible progress can be attained promptly. Thus, for this purpose, precision at the cutting point is irrelevant.

The third purpose of minimum competency tests is school assessment. The program assessment function should measure efficiently all levels of the competence, above as well as below the standard. Unless growth is known over the full range, the impact of the school cannot be judged fairly. For this purpose, neither precision nor inclusiveness is particularly important.

Thus, it can be seen that these three uses of the test call for items of varying content heterogeneity and levels of difficulty. These different requirements can be met by ensuring that adequate numbers of items for each purpose are included. This means a relatively long test but one that can be controlled by careful definition of the content of the test. Note that none of these considerations dictate, by itself,

what the content of the items should be. To this matter we may now turn.

Again, consider the first purpose of these tests: the classification of students as meeting or not meeting the minimum standard of competence. It will be recalled that for this purpose the test items should all be of about the same difficulty and should measure much the same thing. Plainly, the validity of the test will hinge on what it is that is measured. What are the competencies that concern us?

Basically, there are two schools of thought on what is the proper content of a minimum competency test. The first of these approaches may be called the "survival skills" approach in which tasks ordinarily encountered by adults become the test content. In this approach, the test materials use such things as income tax forms, job applications, television listings, newspaper articles, and road maps. The test questions are meant to find out if the student understands what is in these, how to use them, and if the student can perform the tasks required. Test items can be made for as many of these survival skills as one wishes.

The other approach to content is to use the traditional categories of knowledge and skills used in schools. This "basic skills approach" uses a test which is very much like the customary standardized achievement test of reading, arithmetic and the like. The difference is that complicated and abstract test questions meant to measure the upper ranges of academic skill are not included. Also, there is probably greater than usual care in eliminating the need for background knowledge, vocabulary, and other skills not being measured. Again, minimum competencies can be assessed in as many areas of school instruction as one wishes. It is preferable to have separate tests for each distinct skill.

The advantage of the survival skills approach is that everybody, including the students, can recognize the need for these skills. Content or at least face validity is strong. This may also simplify, albeit not solve, the problem of setting a standard. However, it should also be apparent that such performances are complex, involving a variety of skills. Therefore, it will prove most difficult to find many items which can perform the diagnostic function well. Given such content the test results will help neither the teachers, nor those that fail to find out what to do about the failure. Is it just that the students do not know the particular words used, or is it they do not know how to read anything? Perhaps the problem lies in their arithmetic or writing skills, or perhaps in their thin knowledge of the document's purpose. If you do not understand what income taxes are all about, the form is likely to be even more baffling than it is to those of us who think we understand. I realize that, given the degree of bafflement commonly found among those assumed to be fully competent, this example may be a bit ludicrous, but I trust its point is clear nonetheless. Would making these materials the content of instruction solve the problem? There are two reasons to doubt this would work. One reason is that if the difficulty lies in one of the basic skills, the survival materials are poor vehicles for remediation because they involve so many other complex skills simultaneously. Another reason is that such training typically does not generalize well at low levels of performance. Change the IRS form (as they always do) that the students have been trained to complete, and most of them will be back almost to ground zero. For these same reasons it is hard to see how a survival skills test can serve the pur-

pose of school assessment well.

A basic skills approach does not have these difficulties to the same degree. Putting together a basic skills test with some desired item characteristics usually is not hard. To be sure it is still something of an art rather than a full technology, but it has a relatively large number of competent practitioners. The content is ordinarily derived from instructional materials so that planning instruction from the diagnosed needs is relatively straightforward. Similarly, using results of tests of this sort for the other purposes is also relatively well understood.

The disadvantage is the greater degree of difficulty in establishing a reasonable standard. That is not to say that a survival skills approach eliminates this problem; in fact, this advantage in standard setting is probably smaller than it appears at first. To be sure nobody usually has much difficulty in illustrating either fully competent performances or in describing incompetence in this context. Nevertheless, deciding where to draw the line is not easy. This is basically because the decision is philosophical or, if you prefer, political in nature. There is no technical answer which can enable one to avoid having to say something like, "Minimum competence is a score of 80% or better on this test." Ultimately, it comes down to such a decision whichever approach is taken. The decision is arbitrary but can be helped by both logical analyses and by looking at normative data. The latter is helpful because if the standard turns out to classify at below competence more than half the graduating class, then it may be reasonable to argue that the standard is too high. This leads me to a consideration of one more question.

Both the issue of how to set the standard and the diagnostic issue lead many people to argue that tests of minimum competence should be criterion-referenced in nature. My own feeling is that such a conclusion is not warranted. In a sense, to argue about this is to create a pseudo-issue since once both the content and item characteristics desired are determined, the test is defined. Labelling it either criterion or norm referenced will not matter. However, I do not mean to weasel. The sort of test I am recommending is more like a norm-referenced test than what most people think of when they use the term criterion-referenced. However, it is not quite like those now in common use.

Let me review my conclusions. I recommend a test that will serve all three purposes simultaneously. That in turn, I believe, points strongly to measures of basic academic skills rather than to survival skill tests. Probably a test is needed for each of the three R's. Each test needs a meaningful total score which can be used both to determine the status of each student relative to the standard and to assess the school program. Norms should be established as well as a cutting point or range. The tests should also have many relatively easy items, far more than is common, falling into a specified number of subskill categories for diagnostic purposes. The College Test Bureau's experience with the new version of the California Achievement Tests, Forms C & D, indicate this sort of norm-referenced test/criterion-referenced test compromise is possible.

Existing standardized achievement batteries will not serve the purpose. Their content is too closely tied to the grade-by-grade school curriculum. Their content is also too broad. Further, their range of

item difficulties is too wide and their coverage of the simpler skills is too thin in their upper levels.

Thus, new tests are needed. They would be fairly long in each area and would be easy in comparison to current standardized tests. Special efforts to eliminate extraneous skills and knowledge should be made.

Thus, for example, much more carefully controlled (and easier) standards of vocabulary and readability level should be established. Similar care about calling upon irrelevant general information should be taken. I would note that such precautions should reduce ethnic bias, but I also urge that separate ethnic data be obtained during construction and used to further reduce bias. Minority groups are more likely to be affected by these tests than are other groups and, therefore, even a small amount of bias can be serious.

The tests should be suitable for administration to seventh grade students, i.e., they should produce meaningful results for students entering junior high school. As the growth curves for most general achievement batteries show, basic skill growth usually starts to slow at that level. Hence, that is where the initial sorting, individual diagnoses, and evaluation of minimum competency programs should begin.

I do not know of any tests which meet all the criteria I have just described, but I am sure there will soon be some. I predict they will turn out to be good tests and more useful than most.



## THE NEED FOR TEST SECURITY

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Little has been written about test security. If large assessment programs are to have integrity, test security is of paramount importance. To have true accountability, no situation can make it possible for one student to perform better than another because of a breach in test security.

For purposes of this discussion, I shall define a secure test as a form of a nationally standardized test which can be administered only one time. Once it has been administered, total security can no longer be assumed. Thus, a secure test is not available commercially and has been disseminated prior to its first administration only as part of a research and development process.

To ensure test security, many careful steps must be taken.

### 1. Definition of Skill Areas

The parameters of the test are defined. Levels of the students, and scoring and reporting services for each of the subtests at each of the grade levels, must be delineated.

### 2. Test Development

Testing companies are invited to bid on a contract for a secure test in the defined skill areas. Once a contract is selected, the following security steps are taken:

- a. The contractor appoints a Research and Development Coordinator to oversee the editorial preparation of the

program. This Coordinator controls the flow of all materials necessary for the editorial process.

- b. The editorial staff working on the program is kept to a minimum and only persons authorized by the Coordinator are allowed access to the materials.
- c. The Coordinator maintains a log of the flow of materials in the editorial process. All materials are returned at the end of each working day to a locked security location.
- d. No materials are allowed off the contractor's site during the editorial phase.
- e. No duplication of materials is allowed during the editorial phase.
- f. The instrument is given a fictitious title during the preparation phases so that it will not be identifiable by outsiders.
- g. Authors of items are asked to give written verification of the destruction of all materials in their possession.
- h. The test is standardized nationally. No locations within the geographic area to be tested can be used, but nearby communities are acceptable. During the standardization phase two important steps are needed: first, all locations that administered experimental materials are asked for written confirmation of the

destruction or impoundment of those materials; second, all loose copies of the experimental materials are destroyed or impounded.

### 3. Materials Production

Once the test has been standardized, mass production of the testing material must start. During this phase, test booklets, lists of correct answers, and directions for administering must be kept secure using these steps:

- a. The Director of Production takes personal overall control of the project.
- b. The production staff is kept to a minimum and only persons authorized by the Production Director are allowed access.
- c. All working copies, mechanicals, repro proofs, etc., are logged in and out, and are locked up at the end of each working day.
- d. All suppliers, the number kept to a minimum, are notified of the strict security requirements and their acknowledgment of intention to comply is obtained.
- e. Typographers lock up standing type when not in use. "Make-ready" proofs and repros are destroyed under supervision.
- f. No unnecessary copies of the materials are allowed. All duplicate repros are returned and accounted for.

- g. Printers are instructed to lock up final proofs and negatives, with access granted only to authorized personnel.
- h. Pressmen and bindery superintendent account for all sheets. All waste is cut and bailed under supervision.
- i. Work-in-progress is gathered and secured or guarded at night.
- j. No unauthorized visitors are allowed in the plants, and the plants are never totally empty of personnel.
- k. All materials sent to outside suppliers are sent to a specific individual, with an acknowledgment of receipt required. Any required mailing is registered.
- l. Materials shipped to contractor are covered and strapped on skids. All cartons are numbered and accounted for.

#### 4. Materials Distribution

As materials are distributed for administration, security must be maintained using these steps:

- a. The warehouse manager is responsible for this phase of security.
- b. The warehouse staff working on the project is kept to a minimum, and only authorized personnel are allowed access. Supervisory personnel are present whenever materials are being packaged.
- c. Seals and covers on skids are not broken until it

is time to package and distribute the materials.

Unpackaged, loose materials are secured at the end of each working day.

- d. The contractor uses its own hired drivers and owned or leased equipment to deliver the materials to the school agency. The material is delivered only to individuals specified by that school agency.
  - e. Some three months in advance a list of specific sites and their addresses are selected.
  - f. A definite shipment date must be agreed upon for all materials to reach each drop site.
  - g. At each site a delivery receipt is provided, dated and signed by a specified, authorized person. Material is itemized within grade for each school and within each school district one week after the materials are received.
  - h. Specific procedures for test administration are mandated within each school.
  - i. All materials returned are accounted for through a fool-proof number system.
5. Scoring and Reporting Program

A scoring subcontractor provides a Manager of Programs and Services to supervise the scoring and reporting system. This system is kept secure by the following steps:

- a. The staff working on the project both in the contractor's plant and at its scoring subcontractor is kept to a minimum, and only authorized personnel are given access.
- b. The scoring subcontractor has stringent security regulations regarding access to its facilities and is experienced in processing high-security programs. This security includes bonded personnel the use of closed-circuit television in its loading areas.
- c. No materials are allowed outside the contractor's premises except those sent to an outside vendor, which are shipped by registered mail to specific individuals.
- d. The contractor only supplies to the school agency the information necessary for it to score Digitek answer sheets. No answer to the test questions themselves are provided.

As was stated earlier, once a test is administered, it can no longer be considered secure. The procedures just outlined will make probable, and will guarantee as much as is humanly possible, that a test will remain secure until it is administered.

PART III - SUMMATION

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## WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MINIMUM COMPETENCIES

Richard M. Bossone  
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Throughout this National Conference, people have asked searching questions about minimum competencies. During the speeches, discussions that followed, the luncheon, and informal conversations, questions covered the many issues that affect students, teachers, administrators, parents, legislators, and the public-at-large.

The questions and answers that follow attempt to sum up what was said at this Conference about the complex subject of minimum competencies. These questions and answers are not meant to be all-inclusive, but rather are intended to provide basic information to people who need help in trying to understand the growing national movement toward minimum competencies.

Q1. WHAT IS MEANT BY MINIMUM COMPETENCIES?

A1. Minimum competencies are basic proficiencies in skills and the knowledge needed to perform successfully in real-life activities. Education for minimum competencies, sometimes known as competency-based education, concerns the application of a set of skills, such as reading, writing, and computation, to a set of general knowledge areas, such as consumer economics, government and law, occupations, and health.

The setting of appropriate levels of competence and the



selecting of specific skills and knowledge that determine competence often lead to heated debates among educators. The goals of competency-based education depend on what is to be emphasized: real-life activities or academic skills. The former choice implies major changes in the school curriculum; the latter choice implies fewer changes. The most widely accepted approach is built upon competencies both in skills and real-life activities, to allow for individuality and options in meeting graduation requirements.

(References: Pipho, Ambach, Green, Hart, Gordon)\*

Q2. WHAT STATES HAVE LEGISLATED MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS?

A2. To date, seven states have enacted minimum competency legislation: California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, and Washington. Also at this time, new minimum competency legislation is pending in ten states.

Further, the state department or board of education in nine states has mandated minimum competency requirements: Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oregon,

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\* Following each answer in this summation, the reader is referred to the papers in this publication which further explicate the topic.

and Vermont.

(References: Piphoo and Appendix C)

Q3. WHY THE GREAT PUSH FOR STATE LEGISLATION REGARDING MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS?

A3. Public concern is mounting about the value of a high school diploma in light of reports about the skills deficiencies of today's graduates. Declining scores on local and national tests, reports of grade inflation, and the discovery that many high school graduates cannot read, write, or compute adequately, have led legislators to demand measurable results from the tax dollars allocated to education. At the same time, parents are demanding that mere attendance not be the governing factor for graduation and that their children be "up to grade level" in their skills and knowledge.

As many people have become skeptical, negative, or openly hostile about the quality of a high school education today, a new trend toward redress in the courts is developing. The parents of a 1976 graduate of Copiague High School, Lindenhurst, Long Island, New York, are suing the school district for five million dollars on the grounds of "educational malpractice." The Peter Doe case in California involves similar action.

In light of these developments, legislation, which ranges

from explicit directives to simple expressions of concern, is becoming increasingly common.

(References: Piphon, Ambach, Hart, Gordon)

Q4. HOW SHOULD STANDARDS FOR MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS BE SET?

A4. The public and legislators are giving the signal for minimum competency requirements; educators are charged with implementing the programs. The setting of minimum standards of competence takes place either on a local or statewide basis. Consensus is the crucial component in setting standards. The decision-making process used in determining standards should include the active participation of many groups: teachers, students, administrators, parents, the business community, and scholars who are aware of recent research in their fields.

Once standards are set, tests and guidelines for instruction must be developed, again, with close consultation among all concerned groups. Equally important, the state department of education has a particular responsibility to be continually available to school districts to explain guidelines, to facilitate overall implementation, and to assist with the special local needs of each school district. Without such sensitive cooperation and interaction, no program of

minimum competencies can be effective.

(References: Pipher, Ambach, Wilson, Green, Hart, Gordon)

Q5. HOW ARE COMPETENCIES MEASURED?

A5. Tests are used to measure competencies. These tests are designed to measure mastery, not the achievement of one student compared to another. The question of where a student falls in a normal-distribution does not apply to competency tests. Rather, students are given a non-competitive chance to demonstrate whether or not they have reached a set level of proficiency. Competency tests simply tell if a student has, and can apply, certain skills and knowledge. Thus, a norm-referenced achievement test cannot be taken "off the shelf" and used.

Many local decisions about testing modes, item criteria, and item characteristics must be made before a competency test can be properly constructed. In building such tests, all concerned groups must be sure that the test is testing what it is intended to test. In the process of quantification, care must be taken that a subject is not trivialized or circumscribed. The curriculum must guide the test; the test cannot guide the curriculum. Also, to follow the example of California, alternatives to paper and pencil tests should be devised on the local level so that the specific needs of

certain groups of students and certain areas of the curriculum can be taken into consideration.

(References: Pipho, Wilson, Green, Hart, Gordon)

Q6. WHAT PURPOSES DO MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTS SERVE?

A6. Minimum competency tests have many potential purposes, only some of which any one locality can use: (1) to certify upon graduation; (2) to permit students to leave school early; (3) to set promotion standards from one grade to the next; (4) to identify weak students so that remedial instruction can be provided; (5) to guide decisions for distribution of state aid to localities; (6) to assess how well a school or school district is preparing its students.

Most authorities agree that minimum competency tests are most useful when they "screen in," rather than "screen out," students. Thus, the tests must identify deficiencies early enough to give students the remedial programs they need in order to achieve the desired levels of proficiency. Because minimum competency tests intimately affect the lives of students, the test results must translate into constructive educational programs.

(References: Pipho, Ambach, Green, Hart, Gordon)

Q7. HOW CAN TEST SECURITY BE ENSURED?

A7. Unless security can be ensured with exacting and thorough attention to all details of test production, testing becomes meaningless. Test security procedures, however, are expensive because safeguards must be provided for test definition, test preparation and standardization, and production and distribution of materials.

Realistically, after a test has been administered once, it can no longer be considered totally secure. Of course, alternate forms can be developed using the same security procedures established for the original test. Commitment to a minimum competency testing program entails, therefore, careful attention to test security.

(Reference: Polemeni)

Q8. HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT WE HAVE PROPERLY TRAINED TEACHERS TO CARRY OUT THE INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS OF MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS?

A8. Most of the teachers in today's high schools have not had the proper training to teach the basic skills: reading, writing, and computation. The unfortunate result of this lack of training is irrefutable. Today's high school graduates are seriously deficient in their basic skills.

No minimum competency program can be complete, therefore, with-

out a strong teacher-training component. Such training is necessary if skills instruction is to be unified and based on the latest research.<sup>1</sup> Further, such training is necessary if instructors are to avoid teaching to a test or fragmenting skills into meaningless, nonintegrated bits. Equally important, such training must show teachers how to integrate the teaching of skills with humanistic studies. Teacher training programs cannot be side-stepped; the assumption that all of today's high school teachers are equipped to teach skills is inaccurate.

(Reference: Hart)

Q9. WHERE DO WE GET THE RESOURCES TO COVER THE COST OF MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAMS?

A9. To be effective, minimum competency programs demand special financial resources. Test development, test security, teacher training, and remedial instruction require budget allocations beyond those presently available to the schools.

Some people assume that the schools should be able to provide such programs without special funds. On the surface this might

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<sup>1</sup> See A Strategy for Coping With High School and College Remedial English Problems, Richard M. Bossone and Lynn Quitman Troyka, The Center for Advanced Study in Education, CUNY Graduate School, 1976.

seem reasonable, but a closer look reveals costly problems. Competency-based tests must be created, teachers must be trained, remedial instruction must be made available. Further, such instruction must be designed to be effective under the unusually difficult circumstances that face today's schools: erratic student attendance, lack of student discipline, disintegration of family, and a culture dominated by television.

The public must recognize the need for proper resources and vote for legislation accordingly. Further, private foundations need to assign special priority to awarding monies to academic institutions for training teachers in basic skills instruction. Educators cannot be held singly accountable for student proficiency unless they are given proper financial support to implement effective minimum competency programs.

(References: Piphoo, Polemeni, Hart)

Q10. WILL MINIMUM COMPETENCIES BECOME MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHER GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS?

A10. The best high school graduation requirements should reflect the mastery of minimum competencies as well as the successful completion of required courses.

Mastery of minimum competencies is directed more toward the lower one-third of the student body than it is toward the majority



of students. Students in the lower third of their classes generally are ignored and are passed from grade to grade merely on the basis of attendance. The minimum competency movement, then, focuses more attention on these students by requiring that they become proficient in basic skills before graduating from high school.

Recognition of the needs of the lower third of a class does not preclude continued close attention to the more capable students in a class. Schools must continue their comprehensive programs for more advanced students so that excellence is developed along with competence for weaker students.

(References: Piphio, Ambach, Hart)

APPENDIX A

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CONFERENCE PROGRAM

- 8:30 - 9:15 a.m. Registration - Coffee and Danish  
Auditorium
- 9:15 a.m. Opening Remarks
- Dr. Max Weiner, Director, Center for Advanced  
Study in Education  
The Honorable Amelia Ashe, Member of the Board  
of Education of the City of New York  
Dr. Richard M. Bossone, Conference Chairman,  
City University of New York
- 10:00 a.m. An Overview Regarding Minimum Competencies
- Review of Legislation - Dr. Chris Pipho,  
Associate Director, Department of Research  
and Information Services, Education  
Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado
- Problems and Issues - Mr. Gordon Ambach,  
Executive Deputy Commissioner,  
New York State Education Department
- 11:30 a.m. Discussion from Floor
- 12 noon Lunch
- Luncheon Speaker: The Honorable Melvin H. Miller,  
Assemblyman, State of New York
- 1:30 p.m. Current Testing and Measurement Strategies
- Objectives - Dr. H.A. Wilson, Director,  
Exercise Development, Education Commission  
of the States, Denver, Colorado
- Item Characteristics and Criteria -  
Dr. Donald Ross Green, Director of Research,  
California Testing Bureau, Monterey, California
- Test Security - Dr. Anthony Polemeni, Director,  
Office of Educational Evaluation,  
New York City Schools
- 3:30 p.m. Discussion from Floor
- 4:00 p.m. Summation - Dr. Lynn Quitman Troyka,  
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APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

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**Education Commission of the States**

**UPDATE IV: MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING**

- \* State Legislation
- \* State Board of Education Rulings
- \* State Department of Education Activity
- \* Local District Programs

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## INTRODUCTION

At the close of 1976, seven states had enacted legislation and another nine states had taken either state board or state department of education action to mandate some form of minimal competency activity. Setting standards for high school graduation or grade-to-grade promotion is the assumed goal of much of this state activity but, as the issue broadens the specific thrust in some states does not always include a mandate for testing or required standards for high school graduation.

The "early out" testing concept now being implemented in California and still alive in Florida remains unique to these two states. Legislative and state board interest appears to be moving more toward setting standards for high school graduation and in some cases establishing standards at the junior high or elementary school level. Legislation in Washington and Virginia are two examples of this move downward. Florida is the first state to ban the use of "social promotion" and mandate grade promotion based on performance.

At the close of the first two months of 1977 nine states had thirteen legislative bills dealing with minimal competency under consideration and one state board of education had adopted proficiency high school graduation requirements. State boards of education and state departments of education in a number of states have the issue under study and are expected to take action in the spring of 1977.

The Education Commission of the States will continue to monitor all aspects of the minimal competency issue. If the legislature, state board or department of education or school districts in your state have taken action or are contemplating action on minimal competency testing, please send us the information. Increasingly we are asked for information dealing with implementation procedures and problems. Any analysis, study or progress report on the implementation of minimal competency programs will also be useful.

The section of prior "updates" containing full text copies of legislation has been dropped from Update IV. If you are in need of specific information on bills (passed or failed), the names of contact people, or a more up-to-date report on state activity do not hesitate to call or write.

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CALIFORNIA - Legislation Enacted:

SB 1112 of 1972 and SB 1243 (providing for funding) of 1975. The two acts combined provide for the California High School Proficiency Test. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds, upon successful completion of the test, may be awarded a proficiency certificate legally equivalent to a high school diploma. They may leave high school if they pass the test and receive parent permission. The test covers the process areas of reading and computation and the content areas of consumer economics and mathematics.

SB 1502, Ch. 315, (1976) will change the existing "early out" minimal competency test program by making it available to citizens over the age of 18. The effects of this law on the existing GED high school equivalency program are not clear.

AB 3408, Ch. 856, (1976) requires districts to establish standards of proficiency in the basic skill areas, including reading, writing and computation. It also provides that students be tested at least once during grade 7 through 9 and twice between grades 10 and 11. Parent-student-principal-teacher conferences and remedial classes are to be arranged for those students who fail to demonstrate minimal proficiency. No student can receive a high school diploma after June 1980 unless he or she passes the proficiency test.

AB 2725, Ch. 473, (1976) requires that examples of minimal academic standards for high school graduation be prepared and distributed by the California State Board of Education. This is to include criteria utilized by the department of education in developing standards for competency in basic skills for the high school proficiency exam. The effective date is Jan. 1, 1977.

- Legislation Failed, 1976:

SB 1751 The measure encompasses recommendations made by the RISE (Reform in Intermediate and Secondary Education) Commission. One of the provisions of the bill is a requirement for the testing of minimal competency in basic skills and other areas.

AB 2559 This bill prohibits the admission or promotion of an elementary grade pupil to any particular grade unless reading ability is at least equal to that prescribed for pupils in the next lower grade. Ability is to be determined in a manner prescribed by the state board of education.

ACR 195 Requests the state department of education to take necessary measures to ensure that no student will be passed to the second grade without the ability to know and write the alphabet, know basic language sounds, and pass a standard reading test developed by the department.

- Local District:

Los Angeles Beginning in June of 1979, the high school students will be awarded a diploma if they pass a reading proficiency test. Students will have up to four opportunities to pass the test with remedial instruction available to those who do not pass the test.



San Jose USD Working on minimal competency for intermediate schools.

Norwalk-Miranda  
Whittier-Union  
Kern Union HSD  
Newport-Mesa USD

These districts are working on programs to establish competency graduation requirements.

COLORADO - Legislation Enacted:

SB 180 of 1975 (C.R.S. 22-32-109.5). The Act stipulates that if a local board of education imposes any special proficiency test for graduation from the 12th grade beyond the regular requirements for satisfactory completion of the courses and hours prescribed for graduation, the results of such tests shall be used by school districts to design regular or special classes to meet the needs of all children as indicated by overall test results. If a school board decides to impose such proficiency tests, such tests shall be given at least twice during each school year with initial testing to take place in the ninth grade. Any child who does not satisfactorily fulfill the requirements of special proficiency tests imposed under the provisions of the act "shall be provided with remedial or tutorial services during the school day in the subject area in which the test indicates deficiencies for graduation purposes. Such child shall be provided with these services from the time of the initial testing until such time as the results of the special proficiency test are satisfactory. Parents of children not satisfactorily fulfilling the requirements of a special proficiency test shall be provided with all special proficiency test scores for their child a minimum of once each semester"

- Local District:

The Denver Public Schools have developed their own minimum competency test for high school graduation. Since 1962 they have tested more than 40,000 students. The test contains subsections on mathematics, spelling, language and reading. Remedial classes are provided for those who do not pass the test.

CONNECTICUT - Legislation Enacted:

Sub HB 5839 This proposal would have required students to take a proficiency exam prior to graduation from high school. Those students passing the examination would receive special notice to that effect on their high school diploma. The bill made no provisions for early exit but sought simply to establish uniform state standards of performance that would serve as minimum targets for secondary school education and improve the validity of the diploma issued to those successfully tested.

(Note: This law was not implemented because the contingency in Sec. 4 was not met.)

CONNECTICUT - Legislation Failed, 1976:

HB 5856 The measure would have allowed high school graduates and non-graduates to receive a state certificate of achievement. It provided for exemption from the compulsory attendance age of 16, directed the state department of education to establish standards of competency in basic skills and a means of testing such competency, and would have allowed both high school graduates and nongraduates to obtain a state certificate of achievement upon passing a state-administered proficiency examination. The bill also protected the basic educational entitlement-- a flat grant based on Average Daily Membership (ADM)--to the extent that the amount of such state aid would not reflect the loss of up to one per cent of the enrollment that might leave school after passing the examination.

HB 5857 Concerning early exit from high school, the bill was similar in most provisions to HB 5856 but would have allowed students who passed the state-administered proficiency examination to complete high school with an equivalent diploma prior to the end of their senior year. The bill would have provided for exit from high school in either the 10th, 11th or 12th grade, depending on the length of time required to master minimum competencies sufficient to pass the examination.

DELAWARE - State Board of Education:

In December of 1976 the state board of education passed a resolution calling for the state department of education to develop (by January of 1977) a list of general competencies to be used as a prerequisite for high school graduation. The state department of education is also to select a test instrument, work on additional competency statements and by July of 1977 have a plan for competency based education for 9th grade to be used at the beginning of the 1977-78 school year.

FLORIDA - Legislation Enacted:

CSSB 340 of 1975 (F.S. 229.814). Provisionally lowers the age of compulsory school attendance from 16 to 14 years. The Act provides that any student who is at least 16 years old may be permitted to take a high school equivalency diploma examination; and that students who are at least 14 and have the approval of a parent or guardian also may be permitted to take the examination. Any student who attains satisfactory performance on the examination shall be awarded a high school equivalency diploma and shall be exempted from the compulsory school attendance requirements. NOTE: This law was amended in 1976 by Section IX of CSSB 107 (see below). This amendment removed age requirements and put the emphasis on reform of the total secondary school system and how students interface with their postsecondary education programs. Equivalency examinations are still included in the law.

CSSB 107 of 1976 (Ch. 76.226). This is an extensive law modifying many sections of the existing code. Accountability, comprehensive planning by state departments of education and local districts, equivalency examinations, subject area examinations and grade-to-grade promotion are all affected. The sections which specifically apply to minimal competency testing are:

Section 1. Sets forth a short title, "The Educational Accountability Act of 1976," and legislative intent, which includes a requirement that the state system of public education give students at least the minimum skills necessary to function and survive in today's society.

Section 6. Substantially rewords the statute authorizing the statewide testing program to clarify legislative intent. The program will test students' basic skills in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 and the data will be used to improve the state system of education by identifying needs and assessing how well districts and schools are meeting minimum standards--how well education programs are equipping students with those minimum skills necessary to function and survive in today's society.

The commissioner of education is required to monitor the results of the statewide testing and provide technical assistance to those districts where deficiencies are identified.

Section 9. Amends F. S. 229.814, to provide for subject area examinations in addition to the high school equivalency examination which shall be made available to eligible students. The bill further amends this section to require school districts and community colleges to plan cooperatively to provide advanced instruction to students who demonstrate readiness for such activities.

Section 13. Amends F. S. 230.2311, (The Basic Skills Act) to provide that basic skills must be tied to performance and ability to survive in today's society--"functional literacy."

Section 15. Requires programs of pupil progression based upon performance by July 1, 1977 (designed to eliminate social promotion).

Such programs must be based upon local goals and objectives. More emphasis must be placed on performance in basic skills (on statewide tests) before students may progress from grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. Other factors for progression must be set by school board rule.

By the 1978-79 school year, there must be established district standards for high school graduation that are to include: (1) mastery of basic skills and satisfactory performance in functional literacy as designated by the state; and (2) completion of the minimum number of credits required by the district school board. Each district is required to provide remediation for students unable to meet such standards, and to provide for the awarding of differentiated diplomas to correspond with the varying achievement levels and competencies of graduates.

FLORIDA - Legislation Failed 1976:

HB 2455 (died in committee) Would have repealed CSSB 340 of 1975.

HB 2659 At one time in the 1976 session, the bill was similar to an early version of SB 107 which passed as CSSB 107 (Ch. 76-223). See Legislation Enacted.

HB 2877 Functional Literacy exam/11th grade. Requires 11th grade students to pass functional literacy examination in reading, writing and mathematics to high school graduation, with appropriate exams at the 5th grade for promotion to the next grade at the 3rd and 8th grades, beginning September, 1977. (Similar to HB 2659).

- Local Districts:

Duval County, Jacksonville High school seniors will take a one-hour test of functional literacy. The programs will begin with ninth graders in the 1976-77 school year.

West Palm Beach The school board took action May 1976 requiring all high school juniors to take the APL high school level test. Beginning with the class of 1978 all students must pass this test as a requirement for obtaining a diploma.

GEORGIA - State Board of Education:

The state board of education has mandated that all fourth-graders in the state take a criterion referenced reading test. The results of this test are currently being studied to establish cut-off scores for grade-to-grade promotion. Late in 1976 the state board of education adopted a year long study proposal to investigate the possibility of changing high school graduation requirements so as to include minimal proficiency standards for the life role skills, including specific recommendations for the students as the learner, the individual, the citizen, the consumer and the producer. The recommendations are modeled after the Oregon high school graduation requirements.

HAWAII - Local District:

The Kamehameha Schools (private) has initiated a curricular revision study which will investigate minimal competency structures and their influence on actual instructional programs.

IDAHO - Legislation Failed, 1976:

SB 1390 This bill would have directed the state superintendent of public instruction to develop a testing program covering the basic skill areas. The test results were to be reported to the legislature.

INDIANA - Local District:

Gary, Indiana has a competency diploma requirement to take effect with the class of 1977.

IOWA - Local District:

Minimal competency activity has been reported in Metro High School, Cedar Rapids.

KANSAS - Legislation Failed, 1976:

SB 406 The measure would have required high school students to take a general examination as a requirement for graduation.

KENTUCKY - State Board of Education:

The state board of education has instructed the state department of education to make a study of competency based education and minimal requirements for high school graduation.

LOUISIANA - State Department of Education:

The state department of education has requested the state board of education to include a study of minimal competency testing within the development of a state master plan for education.

LOUISIANA - Legislation Failed, 1976:

HB 1261 (died in house committee) The bill would have established minimum educational standards to be met by students in each grade or subject area and provided for remedial courses.

MARYLAND - Legislation Enacted, 1976:

HB 1453 (M.A.C. Art. 77, Sec. 980) This new section requires the state board of education to prescribe progressively advanced minimum reading levels for grades two through 12; and further provides that pupil may not enter grades three through eight until it has been determined that he has met the minimum level for the previous grade, with certain exemptions.

- Legislation Failed, 1976:

SJR 64 The proposal would have requested the state board of education to require a minimum level of proficiency in basic skills as a pre-requisite to high school graduation.

In January of 1977, State Superintendent David W. Hornbeck presented a plan to the state board of education called "Project Basic". The plan approved by the board calls for the setting of new standards for minimal competencies in "five areas of human development" by 1982.

- State Board of Education:

The state board of education is studying the issues related to the creation of a minimum basic proficiency examination for high school graduation. A decision is anticipated in the summer of 1976.

The state department of education has developed the Maryland basic mastery test for reading now being administered in grades six, nine, and 12. This "survival reading test" (forms b and c, ninth and 12th grade level) is also being administered in the fall of each school year to grades seven and 11 as a part of the statewide accountability program.

MASSACHUSETTS - State Department of Education:

A preliminary report on high school competency standards has been reported to the state board of education. The report outlined six skill areas in which students should be tested before graduation. The board agreed that testing should be required before graduation. The board agreed that testing should be required in communication and computational skills and that the areas of career knowledge, social responsibility, environment and culture be tested at the discretion of local school districts. The board is expected to take final action in April of 1977.

MICHIGAN - Legislation Failed, 1976:

HB 6379 Competency examinations for basic high school curriculum would be required by this measure. Certificates would be granted.

SB 1608 A student would be prohibited from receiving a high school diploma unless a comprehensive examination were passed. The test would be prescribed by the state department of education and would reflect a level of reading proficiency appropriate for a high school graduate.

- State Board of Education:

The state board has proposed a 12th grade minimal competency test covering life goal skills in four areas: (a) personal, family and money, (b) civic and social responsibilities, (c) aesthetic and humanistic, and (d) employment. Statewide hearings will be conducted on the test during the early part of 1977.

MINNESOTA - State Department of Education:

The state board of education has created an advisory committee for revision of minimum standards for education.

- Local District:

Southeast Free School in Minneapolis and St. Paul Open School in St. Paul report minimal competency activities.

MISSOURI - State Board of Education:

In April of 1976 the state board of education requested that the state department of education develop a basic skills test to measure the application of basic skills in the areas of reading, mathematics and government/economics. Three forms of the test will be pilot tested in the Spring of 1977 with 8th graders. All districts will be mandated to give the test at the 8th grade by July 1, 1978. At this time the state board has not made high school graduation contingent upon successful completion of the test.



NEBRASKA - State Department of Education:

Elementary and secondary schools are required to establish a minimal performance level in reading, writing and arithmetic. Schools are to re-administer the evaluation instrument until mastery has been demonstrated by all students. The state department of education has an acceptable instrument available if the schools request it.

- Local District:

Westside Community Schools (District 66) currently are using an outcome evaluation study with some reference to basic skill areas.

NEVADA - Local District:

Clarke County, Las Vegas, Nevada is reported to be studying the award of special diplomas indicating student academic excellence.

NEW JERSEY - Legislation Enacted, 1976:

A. 1736 The original bill called for the state to set minimum reading and mathematics standards and for local districts to provide remedial work. As amended and signed by the governor, local districts now have the right to set "interim goals" lower than the state goals and to determine whether students are making progress towards these goals. If progress is not evident districts must come up with a variety of solutions, some of which could be remedial work. These "improvement" plans may combine remediation together with diagnosis of students, study of a district's curriculum, and parent involvement. (Full text of bill included in the Appendix)

- State Board of Education:

The state board of education adopted regulations implementing the Public School Education Act of 1975, (Ch. 212), and, inter alia, requiring local school districts to establish minimum pupil proficiency standards in basic skill areas and provide remediation for children who do not meet those standards. The state board also established a task force to study the desirability of establishing statewide standards. These actions were taken over the objections of those who argued that Ch. 212 by its own terms obligated the state board to establish statewide standards.



NEW YORK - State Board of Education:

The board of regents, on May 26, 1976, approved a resolution establishing the passing of basic competency tests in reading and mathematics as a requirement for issuance of a high school diploma, beginning with the graduating class of June 1979. Consideration is being given to incorporating three additional tests into the graduation requirements effective in June 1980. The three additional tests would be in the areas of (1) civics and citizenship, (2) practical science, including health and drug education, and (3) writing and language skills.

PENNSYLVANIA - State Board of Education:

The state board of education adopted a Position Paper (Jan., 1976) on Community Learning that directs the secretary of education to put before the state board of education within 12 months a plan for public education that defines curriculum in terms of competencies students should be acquiring at various grade levels, rather than in terms of courses and credits, and that marshalls the human and physical resources of the entire community in the development of such competencies. State department of education officials are working with communities to establish competencies. Project 81 is the title given to the effort.

- Legislation Failed, 1976:

HB 770 (died in committee - A 475-page proposed school code revision). The measure would require each school district to determine whether or not its students have developed minimal competencies within mandated courses (academic skills) and to measure student ability to cope with certain specified problems encountered by adults (survival skills). It would obligate the state department of education to develop a procedure to assess student performance in the academic skills learned through mandated programs and to report annually to the legislature regarding the degree of academic and survival skills attained by students at various grade levels together and to make recommendations for improving the educational program. It further provides that, four years after HB 770 becomes law, a written statement certifying which competencies have been attained by each student must become part of the student's permanent record.

OREGON - State Board of Education:

The state board established new graduation requirements in 1972 with local districts required to file implementation plans by July of 1974 for the class of 1978. New requirements were based on credits for courses, attendance and required competencies in personal, social and career areas. Districts are to develop their own performance indicators.

OREGON - State Board of Education:

Revisions in 1976 still require districts to adopt competency statements and performance indicators in all areas by 1978. By then, however, districts must verify that students have minimal competencies covering only the basic skills ("read, listen, analyze, speak, write and compute, using the basic processes") in order to receive a high school diploma. Schools will not be responsible for certifying whether students have attained other competencies until the graduating class of 1981. In other words, instead of assessing goals in all program areas (e. g. language arts, health education, business education), districts will assess the reading, writing and computing skills in three programs of their choice beginning with the class of 1978. Assessments in additional areas as identified by local districts, will be due by 1981. Personal development, social responsibility and career development were originally mandated as headings for the additional competency areas, but the 1976 revisions now allow districts to choose to use these headings, or to develop their own replacement areas for them. The revisions also eliminate a clinically worded section on diagnosis and prescription, but retain the concept as an option for districts.

- Local District:

Parkrose School District, Portland Reports minimal competency activity.

RHODE ISLAND - State Board of Education:

The board of regents directed the state department of education to prepare "high priority statewide educational objectives in measurable terms" and "to identify and compare alternative strategies for determining the extent to which (they) are being achieved." The department has identified the intellectual skills of comprehension, analysis and evaluation and specified performance indicators (measurable life-related tasks) for each skill. Test items on the indicators for high school students are being developed for piloting in the spring of 1977 and subsequent incorporation into the statewide assessment program.

- Local District:

The Alternative Learning Project in Providence involves minimal competency activity.

TENNESSEE - Legislation failed, 1976:

HB 2060 (died in committee). The proposal would have required high school graduation to be diploma-based on proficiency examinations in

reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in sixth and 10th grades would be required to perform in basic skill areas at fifth and ninth grade levels or enroll in remedial programs.

SB 2205 -Davis-Requires that students must read, write and perform simple math at 12th grade level in order to receive high school diploma. Educational Skills Proficiency Act.

VERMONT - The Board of Education:

The Vermont Board of Education has adopted minimal competency standards for local districts to use in setting criteria for high school graduation. Testing is apparently not mandated.

VIRGINIA - Legislation Enacted, 1976:

HB 256 (Standards of Quality Act). The constitution of Virginia calls for the state board of education to prescribe standards of quality for the several school divisions subject to revision by the General Assembly. One of the goals of education in Virginia is to aid students, consistent with their abilities, to become competent in the fundamental academic skills. Each school division is to give highest instructional priority to developing the reading, communications and mathematics skills of all students with particular attention to the primary grades (1-3) and the intermediate grades (4-6). Remedial work for low-achieving students shall begin upon identification of student need.

By September of 1978, the state board of education, in cooperation with local districts, shall establish specific minimum statewide educational objectives and a uniform statewide test in reading, communications and mathematics skills. The test is to measure yearly progress for individual students. The Act also sets standards for career preparation, special education, gifted and talented students, personnel, teacher preparation, testing and measurement, accreditations, planning, public involvement and district policy manuals.

- Local District:

Greenville County Has adopted minimum graduation standards.

WASHINGTON - Legislation Enacted, 1976:

SB 3026 Requires that school districts, with community participation, will develop learning objectives for grades kindergarten through eight. The state department has interpreted that these objectives will be stated in behavioral terms and that the objectives will be measured for actual student attainment at least annually. Compliance with the law will be monitored through the program approval process for the allocation of state funds.

HB 1345, 1976 Requires that all fourth grade students be given a standardized achievement test in the reading, mathematics and language arts. This test was just administered in October 1976 with the results to be used by school districts and parents to compare their children's achievement level with those of other pupils in the district, the state and the nation. The law also provided that a sample of 2,000 students at the eighth and eleventh grades be tested for the same purpose. The school districts are encouraged to establish a separate test for the second grade for the early identification of pupils needing assistance in language and computational skills.

WEST VIRGINIA - Local District:

Kanawha County, Charleston has several committees studying minimal competency issues.

WISCONSIN - State Department of Education:

The State Superintendent has appointed a "Blue Ribbon Committee" to study minimal standards for local districts and make recommendations on the department of public instructions' role in competency based education.

- Local Districts:

Manitowoc Public School District has adopted a proficiency testing requirement.

Sparta and Milwaukee schools are also working on minimal competency requirements.

1977 Activity

ARIZONA - Legislation Pending:

H 2160 Would require the state school superintendent and the state board of education to develop a statewide standard testing program for grades 1-12. The results of the tests would be correlated to individual pupils' class sizes, teachers, teachers' experience and salaries. The state board of education would also be mandated to divide class time of 2nd - 6th grades into "verbal and quantitative segments" and further stipulates there would be no unauthorized segment skipping.

ARKANSAS - Legislation Pending:

HB 609 Educational Assessment. A broad statewide and school district testing bill. It was heavily amended by the House Education Committee but still contains the following provisions:

"State department of education shall by June 1, 1978 develop minimum performance standards for graduation from secondary schools and minimum performance educational goals for various grades and subject areas within the public schools."

The "minimum performance educational goals" are to include the basic skill areas of reading, writing and mathematics.

CALIFORNIA - Legislation Pending:

AB 357 Would require elementary school districts by June 1, 1979, to adopt standards of proficiency in the basic skills. This bill would have students tested at least twice during the fourth through sixth grades and at least once from sixth through eighth grades. Conferences between pupil/parent/principal/teachers would be required if the pupil falls short of the standards.

IDAHO - State Board of Education Activity:

Early in February 1977, the Idaho State Board of Education adopted new graduation requirements and a district-option proficiency program that measures competency in reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling prior to high school graduation. Participating districts will be required to give the test beginning in the ninth grade and to provide remedial work for the students not passing the standards. Students will graduate with a diploma bearing the state board of education seal.

IDAHO - State Board of Education Activity (continued):

Students who are not in participating districts will receive certificates of attendance or a plain diploma.

KANSAS - Legislation Pending:

HB 2139 Would require local boards of education to adopt standards and prescribe an examination for proficiency in basic educational skills including, but not limited to, "reading comprehension, writing and computation." After June 30, 1981 the state board of education will certify that high school graduates have met the state "basic educational skills" standards. Students not meeting the standards will be certified as having completed attendance in a four year course of study.

Prior to July 1, 1978 the state board of education in cooperation with the state board of regents shall determine and establish "standards of proficiency in academic skills" (also a standardized examination) for students preparing for admission to state colleges and universities.

MINNESOTA - Legislation Pending:

HF 44 Provides that the Commissioner of Education, prior to June 30, 1978, shall establish desirable minimum standards of reading achievement for pupils completing grades 6, 9 and 12. The bill also makes an appropriation to the state department of education for the development and dissemination of tests and for teachers and consultants.

HF 118 Provides for a statewide program of assessment of minimal competency in reading, math, language arts and other general subject areas. It would also provide for a program of remedial aid for the 25 percent of the students who have the greatest need.

NEVADA - Legislation Pending:

AB 9 Would require pupils in public schools to complete a prescribed course of study and show proficiency in basic skills before receiving a high school diploma. The state board of education shall adopt the standards and tests for measuring the minimum academic standards. Different standards of proficiency may be adopted for pupils with diagnosed learning disabilities. Local schoolboards are charged with assessing basic skill progress in the regular school program as early as the 7th grade with prescribed conferences for students not showing satisfactory progress.

NEVADA - Legislation Pending (continued):

AB 293 Would require local school boards to administer competency examinations in reading, writing, computation, American History and American Government at the end of grades 3, 6, 9 and 12. Promotion to the next grade and high school graduation would be contingent on passing the examination.

SB 204 Would require public schools to give competency examinations in reading, writing, computation, American History and American Government at the end of grade 6, 8, 10 and 12. Promotion to the next grade and high school graduation would be contingent on passing the examination.

- State Department of Education Activity:

The state department of education has a citizen task force and a teacher task force studying the minimal competency issue.

NORTH CAROLINA - Legislation Pending:

S 80 Would require all students to pass a minimal competency test in reading, writing and mathematics before graduating from high school.

S 81 Would require the 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9th grade students to take a statewide standardized test measuring their progress in learning the basic skills.

NORTH DAKOTA - Legislation Pending:

HB 1460 Would prescribe standards for the high school diploma and allow diplomas to indicate the completion of an optional proficiency test.

SOUTH CAROLINA - Legislation Pending:

H. 2053 Would establish a minimum achievement-level testing program for public school pupils administered by the state board of education. It would require pupils to annually meet to prescribe program standards for grade promotion and provide summer school remedial procedures for pupils who fail to meet them. For the 1977-78 school year the testing program is to be instituted only for the first grade with movement up to the next grade the following year until all twelve grades are included.

APPENDIX D

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THE HART BILL -- AS VIEWED BY ITS AUTHOR\*

Assemblyman Gary Hart  
D - 35th District of Santa Barbara, California

I intend today to speak about Assembly Bill (AB) 3408. I want to give you some insight and knowledge about its origins, discuss some of the legislative problems that we confronted, and present ideas on its implementation.

First, I would like to say that I take pride in being responsible for the proficiency-based legislation (AB 3408) that we have in California. I am the author of the bill, and I worked hard on it; but it is also obvious that had I not authored this legislation, another legislator would have authored something similar. This is very clear for a number of reasons: media attention, declining test scores, complaints from business persons and professors, and students poorly prepared in English. There is a public awareness, a consciousness, about proficiency in our public schools. When I go to speak to service clubs about this whole idea of proficiency education, it receives a very enthusiastic response. There is a real feeling in the community, as reflected in the Gallup polls and other indicators, that the public wants to see changes in high school education.

Some of the reasons we are in this predicament, I think, are evident. With the decline of family importance and of organizations, such as the church, the boy scouts, and other kinds of institutions that have in past

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generations assumed much responsibility for socialization of young people, we have required the schools to assume too much responsibility. As a result, we have many mandated programs, from driver education to sex education, resulting in a proliferation of high school courses. Many important aspects of public school education, such as the basic skills, which AB 3408 focuses on, get deemphasized in relationship to some of these other courses that may have more popular appeal.

We have also given students, in the last fifteen years in California, tremendous opportunities to elect different kinds of courses. For example, in the Santa Barbara high school where I taught ten years ago, students were required to take a year of world history, a year-and-a-half of United States history and American government and politics. Today, we have a very different situation: in social studies, for example, students can take courses in psychology, the American Indian, and many other more specialized kinds of courses. The overview courses that every student in the past was required to take are no longer mandated. In fact, students can completely avoid English, history, or social studies requirements today in our public schools. As a result, one of the problems is that students who have basic deficiencies in some of these areas are able to avoid the traditional requirements. Needless to say, these students are getting very little training in basic skills. Recent test scores, I think, demonstrate this.

Interest in proficiency standards stems from the public's desire for accountability of public institutions. This is true not only of the schools, but of all our institutions, whether they be in health care, or education. This interest can be seen, particularly, in some of the minority communities.

Passing students along without any system of accountability in the educational system is not doing justice to young people in these communities.

Another thing that I know from my personal experience is that most school districts, school administrators, teachers, and other people who are part of the educational establishment, do not want to admit failure. If a fifteen-year-old youngster is told that he is failing in reading and writing, he is going to get upset, and his parents are going to get upset. This is going to cause problems for the principal, the teacher, and the school district. I think that to a certain extent the school districts have been sweeping some of these problems under the rug. The classic case is the so-called Peter Doe case in San Francisco. This youngster, who went through the San Francisco public school system receiving B's and C's, was given no indication that he was doing poorly. He graduated, got a job, but was immediately fired because he didn't know how to read or write. The parents went back through the school records and found no indication of poor skills. As a result, the parents filed suit calling for educational malpractice against the San Francisco school system. Increasingly, we may find that parents and students, feeling that the students have not received a good education, will resort to the courts to find redress.

I would like to share with you a personal and informative experience from my first year of teaching in Santa Barbara that explains the reason I wanted to author this legislation. When I was teaching a senior geography class, I used a standard textbook which approximately a fifth of my students could not cope with. They did not know how to read, and they could not handle the work; therefore, I could not in good conscience give

them any kind of passing grade. Yet, these students were high school seniors, and I did not want to be responsible single-handedly for preventing them from going forward. I checked with my department chairman and the school administrators to find out what I should do in this situation. They explained that if a student came to class and was not disruptive, he got a passing grade. Only if a student was a disciplinary problem and clearly tried to prevent other students from learning could we give a non-passing grade. I went along with that system, but I always felt we were doing a disservice to those youngsters to pass them.

As a result of my personal experience, the public clamor, and the media attention, I introduced AB 3408 in the California legislature to try to do something about these problems. I see this legislation as being a modest, primitive first step in trying to deal with some of the problems that have been identified. I do not see it as a panacea for all of our problems in education. Also, this legislation primarily addresses itself to those students who are in the bottom third of high school classes today. These are the students who have very serious reading, writing, and computational deficiencies.

Let me briefly summarize the basic provisions of AB 3408. The legislation requires that school districts, by June, 1978, must establish standards for graduation in reading comprehension, writing performance, and computational skills, and that the school districts cannot award a high school diploma to any student who does not meet those proficiency standards as of June, 1980. School districts are required to assess students periodically, at least once in the junior high school years and twice in the senior high school years, to determine whether or not the

students are meeting these proficiencies. If there is a determination at this early stage that students are not meeting these proficiencies, the legislation requires that a conference must be called between the principal or his designee, the classroom teacher involved, the student, and the parents to discuss the situation. This is done to impress upon the student and parents the seriousness of the problem and to try to devise some kind of strategy to overcome the problem.

Students, under this legislation, are to be given an opportunity to receive remedial assistance. My intention in writing this legislation was that standards be established in reading, writing, and computational skills somewhere between 9th and 11th grade levels. Again, I emphasize that we are talking about a standard that is going to affect the students at the lower end of the scale; this legislation is not an attempt to raise SAT scores for students who are going to the University of California or other prestigious institutions. Rather, this legislation is primarily trying to get away from the concept of "seat time," receiving a diploma for mere attendance.

Nothing in this legislation requires that proficiency levels be directly related to adult life activities. Some school districts are saying that students must be able to read the Department of Motor Vehicles book, be able to fill out an income tax form, and be able to do what is necessary to survive in our complex society; but none of these so-called survival skills are required in this legislation. This legislation says that there must be some demonstration of reading proficiency, writing performance, and computational skills, and that such a demonstration can be done in a very traditional manner. My bias is that we have to keep

the level of proficiencies fairly low so that we do not overwhelm students and teachers with requirements that are probably impossible to implement.

This legislation also contains an appropriation for the State Department of Education to establish and develop test items and testing standards for use by local school districts. We did not think it appropriate to ask every school district to establish its own standards without help, so we asked the State Department of Education to provide some guidelines and test items. Of course, no school district has to follow what the State Department of Education puts forward, but we do want to assist those school districts that ask for help. This is particularly important for the smaller school districts in the state.

In preparing this legislation, we tried to address four important policy areas. One was the issue of a state test versus a local test. Some people feel that to accomplish what we are trying to do in this legislation we need only one state-wide test so that every student in the state will meet a given level of proficiency; these people feel that divergent standards among districts create an element of unfairness. However, this legislation is clearly going the local option route. This is consistent with course requirements that have been in effect in California for many years. It is important to give people a sense of ownership so that they can integrate this testing program into their existing instructional program. This is an area of some controversy. I notice that when Governor Brown is talking about his own ideas for restructuring schools, he is talking about having some kind of state-mandated test. I am concerned that if that idea gains momentum, all of the work beginning right now in school districts on a localized basis to implement AB 3408 is going to get very confused.

Another important policy area is the graduation requirement in AB 3408. Ultimately, if a student does not meet the proficiency standard, the student will not receive a diploma. In the California State Department of Education this was quite controversial, and was not included in the RISE legislation that was vetoed by the Governor. People argued that if the student does not meet the graduation standard, the student may be unduly penalized or stigmatized. In many instances, the school districts may be at fault, so the student should not be held accountable. This may have some validity, but I feel that if there is no ultimate sanction, no bottom line standard, that these proficiencies, like course requirements, may just become a sham and be ignored. I think that if this graduation requirement were not in this bill, there would be no meeting here today and there would not be as much attention and interest in this legislation as there is. A graduation requirement makes it very clear to people in the educational establishment, as well as to the youngsters involved, that we are serious.

Of course, the ultimate absurdity would be that one week before graduation a student takes a test that is "all or nothing, sink or swim," and if he does not pass, he does not get his diploma. We want to try to get away from that kind of pressure. As I said before, the legislation requires, therefore, one assessment in the junior high school years and two assessments in the senior high school years. Thus, students who are having problems will have opportunities for remediation before it is too late.

A third policy area has to do with students who have learning disabilities. If students are educationally handicapped through no fault of their own, and no matter how hard they try they cannot meet minimal standards,

should they be given some exemption? This is a difficult question to answer because, on the one hand, I want to upgrade what the high school diploma means; on the other hand, by granting exemptions, we are beginning to water down standards. Yet, I feel that students should not be unduly penalized, as long as they are making good, brave efforts to meet these standards. As a result, a provision in the legislation allows local school districts to establish different standards for students who have been diagnosed as having learning disabilities. The California State Department of Education needs to develop standards for determining such learning disabilities. Again, however, this is a local option.

The fourth policy area has to do with bilingual education. Should a student who has come to this country at age fifteen or sixteen be required to meet proficiency standards in the English language? I believe that if a high school diploma is going to mean something in California, in the United State of America, that such students should meet standards in English. Therefore, the legislation contains no exemption for those who cannot speak English.

Now I would like to discuss a few problem areas that I see developing. One is the process by which standards are established. As I mentioned, the date for the establishment of these proficiency standards is June, 1978. I think it is very important in communities, where there is a diversity of ethnic groups and abilities among students, to engage in a public dialogue about what these standards should be. If the school district merely contracts with some professional group to develop a test in some remote part of the state or the country, many people in the community may feel that they did not have any input into this decision making process. They



may fight a prepackaged test presented to them as a fait accompli.

Therefore, parents, students, teachers, as well as professionals who may come from outside the district, must be involved in this process. Trying to get that proper balance in setting standards necessitates that school districts listen very carefully to what the community is saying.

Again, I repeat, we must not get into a situation where the standard is so low that everyone can meet the standard, thus making it a charade or a farce. - Conversely, we do not want a standard that is unduly restrictive or high, so that a large percentage of students fail. The Santa Barbara school district has actually put advertisements in the local newspaper asking for community input about standards. They have undertaken a serious study of this legislation that is very pleasing to see.

One of the interesting spinoffs is that we are not only talking about proficiency standards, we are talking about the meaning of a high school education. We are involving more people in the process. Although at times this can cause problems, can be time consuming, and can cause people to get off on a tangent, involving many people is highly beneficial.

Resources to run this program are another problem. When the bill was first introduced, there was more money in it than when it was passed. The only money that is in the bill is \$375,000 for the State Department of Education to do its work and about \$250,000 for school districts for reimbursement costs for the conferences that are established with parents. There was originally some money in the bill for providing students with the necessary remedial help. However, we had to work very hard in the legislature just to keep the amount of money that ultimately was allocated.

Many members of the legislature who opposed the allocation for remedial

instruction, felt that the school districts should have been providing such instruction all along. I am concerned that we may need some additional resources. One of the things I want to do, therefore, in monitoring the implementation program or assessment process of this legislation is to see if some additional funds are necessary.

I am hoping that one of the beneficial aspects of this legislation will be that through this program, we will begin to identify some of those problems that clearly exist. Then, we will be able to point out to our elected officials what those problems are and what the costs will be to resolve them. For example, the decline in writing performance seems to be greater than in any other single area, and yet we ask English teachers to have 150 students a day in five periods of English. All of our studies indicate that if teachers want to teach students how to write, students must practice writing and have their writing corrected. With 150 students a day, it is very difficult for an English teacher to give the kind of tutorial help that all students need. If we can clearly show that a teacher-student ratio of 150-to-1 in teaching composition is simply unrealistic, I think the legislature and local taxpayers would be responsive to doing something.

Another area that I am concerned about is staff development. Again, using the example of English, we find that many of our English teachers are trained in American literature or poetry, and yet the basic problem is just knowing how to teach reading and writing. This legislation is going to require more English teachers and more teachers who may not have been teaching English to become involved in teaching reading and writing. Teachers do not have the proper training from their undergraduate or

professional course work to be able to do this. We want to try in the legislature to develop some additional resources and some different ways of going about staff development. We are currently working on legislation that should be introduced by the end of the month or the early part of February to address ourselves to the overall problem of staff development which will clearly affect much of work in California public schools.

Another item that we are beginning to hear about from some school districts is that there is not enough time to implement this legislation. The State Department of Education is required by February of next year to have its work done, and four months later school districts are required to have established their proficiency standards. If school districts begin working now and do not wait until next year, I think the deadline can be met. It is going to be tight, and if there is public input, it is even tighter; but again I say I think it can be met.

I also want to mention that some people believe that we should set standards earlier, that is, in elementary school. They want to know why we are waiting until the junior and senior high school years to do this. To develop testing procedures at the elementary school level is difficult, because it may produce adverse effects on the youngsters. It was my feeling, therefore, that it is more appropriate to have some system of accountability at the junior and senior high school level.

Another point that I am concerned about is what is called the "back to basics" mentality. We should have objective standards for achievement in some of the basic skill areas, but I am concerned that this will be done at the expense of flexibility, of creativity, and of innovation. There is a place for the more traditional approach to education, which this

legislation certainly lends itself to; this legislation was not meant to say that less traditional approaches to education have no validity or place in high school. My intent is to have this legislation improve our intellectual standards.

Another provision of the bill has received very little attention and is somewhat confusing to some people: section 8573, which is an attempt to reorder the education code pertaining to course of study requirements. No changes are made in requirements that say that the school districts should have a course of study in English, American history, American government, mathematics, sciences and physical education. Some people at the local level believe they must implement something new, so they attempt to establish proficiency standards in other subject areas that are not required under the legislation. This legislation applies to only three areas: reading comprehension, writing performance, and computational skills.

The one new addition that I feel is significant is that the legislation says, "The governing board with active involvement of parents, administrators, teachers and students shall adopt alternative means for students to complete the prescribed course of study, which may include practical demonstration of skills and competencies, work study, independent study, and credit earned in a post-secondary institution. Requirements for graduation and specified alternative rules for completing the prescribed course of study shall be made available to students, parents, and the public." The State Department of Education already has done this to a certain extent under previous legislation, but most school districts were not aware of it. Again, this is an attempt to establish alternatives to "seat time" as an evaluation criterion.

In conclusion, as I said earlier, this legislation is a first step. It is a beginning, not an end, and I, as the author of the legislation, want to try to monitor it very carefully. We have a tendency in the legislature to see a problem, pass a law, and then go on to something else. To a certain extent, we have to go on to something else, but I think those of us who have a primary interest and involvement in writing a piece of legislation have the responsibility to meet experts like yourselves, to meet with parent groups, to meet with anybody who wants to talk about this legislation so that we can work together to properly implement it. One of the reasons it was very important for me to be here, and to be many other places, is to get some feedback. My desire is to put forth the best possible legislation and to ensure that it works properly. This can only be done with your assistance and cooperation.

FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HART BILL\*

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The purpose of this paper is to explain the process by which the California State Department of Education hopes to facilitate the implementation of AB 3408 (the Hart Bill). I would like to point out initially that the Department, our Superintendent, Dr. Riles, and our State Board of Education, all of whom bear the legal responsibility for implementing the bill at the state level, consider this legislation to be of great significance to the students and the citizens of our state. Implemented well, we think, this legislation will be of great benefit to our students. Implemented poorly or not at all, it can do great damage to the aspirations of our students. Thus, the task before all of us is to make sure that the bill works as well as we can possibly make it work.

I should point out that the information we are now getting indicates there are many misinterpretations about the conditions of AB 3408. Assemblyman Hart has given a good summary of his bill (see previous paper) but he has neglected to mention one item. In recodifying the course of study and graduation standards sections of the Education Code, one of the responsibilities of the Department of Education was to distribute to school districts the criteria-setting process used in the California

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High School Proficiency Examination, created by another provision of existing law, and also to distribute to districts sample items from a test which they might consider in setting their own standards. That provision of the law is not meant to be the sole determinant of the way in which districts set their standards. It is simply meant to be a piece of information that the law had not previously required the Department of Education to distribute.

Let me move then to reviewing with you some of the steps we have been taking in the California State Department of Education to ensure that we implement AB 3408 as well as we possibly can. It is our view that the requirements of AB 3408 have far reaching implications for curriculum, counseling, and assessment processes in each local district. We see this bill as primarily a local responsibility, not a state responsibility. In fact, the legislation specifically provides that the state shall not adopt any minimum standards that shall be used or enforced statewide.

As such, we see the bill as a challenge to each local district, to foster a consensus in the community about what basic skills are, about which basic skills are important, and about levels at which standards in basic skills ought to be set. In addition, appropriate instructional, assessment, and counseling procedures must be developed to ensure that the standards set are inclusionary rather than exclusionary. We need to ensure that the intent of the AB 3408 is achieved, in that all or most of our students by the end of the twelfth grade develop some level of competency, as determined by each district, and go into society with this level of competency as indicated by the high school diploma. We view our

role as doing everything we possibly can within the limitations of the law to facilitate these local processes.

As we have visited around the state, we have discovered that AB 3408 is often mistakenly interpreted as primarily a testing bill. We feel this interpretation is potentially damaging. As Assemblyman Gary Hart has explained, the law requires not merely a test but a systematic process to identify, teach, assess, and counsel students so that they may achieve the required level of competency. Again, I should emphasize that over the past thirty or forty years we have developed a system to try to ensure that every student, regardless of where he or she comes from, or what his or her background is, has the maximum opportunity to achieve in our society. We have moved away from the exclusionary system of credentialing and granting diplomas, to a system that we hope is inclusionary in that every student has an opportunity to achieve. We are very concerned that standards are set realistically so that the high school diploma is a clear reflection of the kinds of skills that the district, its board, and its community feel are important. Such standards cannot be set so high as to systematically exclude particular kinds of families or individuals from moving into a school district and availing themselves of the public schools.

Again, on the issue of whether AB 3408 is a testing bill or is more than that, we are convinced that the techniques of testing and measurement are of critical importance in implementing the bill; however, it is very important that these techniques serve to facilitate rather than to define or control the process through which each district board comes to a consensus on its standards and their implementation.



A major responsibility of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education is the proficiency assessment framework which I will describe later. Beyond this framework our Superintendent and our Board feel much broader responsibilities to provide technical assistance, leadership, and other kinds of help to districts in implementing AB 3408. To highlight our concern that the implementation of AB 3408 emphasizes more than testing and measurement procedures, all of our technical assistance and development work has been and will be a joint effort of our Secondary Education Division and our Office of Program Evaluation and Research.

To facilitate implementation we have, first, made staff available for extensive, technical consultation in the field. We have been trying to clearly explain to the districts the provisions of AB 3408, what it does, what it does not do, what was existing law, and what has been added by AB 3408, so that the kinds of concerns that Assemblyman Hart mentioned are alleviated.

Secondly, we have sent a fairly comprehensive informational letter to clarify what is required by the law. The letter is in effect a detailed analysis of the law, to guide the local superintendent through the provisions that were in existing law and those that have been added, with some commentary on the implications of these revisions.

Thirdly, we have been keeping our State Board of Education, which has technical responsibility for distributing the products that we produce, closely informed about our progress and about our estimate of the implications of this law. In December, we reported to the Board the status of implementation of the bill and discussed with the Board some of the

implications for Board action and state policy. We will be making a further progress report to the Board at their next meeting in February.

Finally, we have convened an ad hoc field advisory committee which is broadly representative yet manageable in size. Representatives of parents, students, administrators, teachers, testing and measurement experts, citizen groups, business and industry, and public interest groups assist our department and our Board in meeting our responsibilities as set forth in AB 3408. Such a group, we believe, will assist us in raising the kinds of key issues and concerns that we sometimes tend to become too isolated from in Sacramento. We met with this group for the first time on January 6, and as we had expected, they did raise a number of very important issues and concerns, some of which have been brought up at this conference, some of which were very new to us and which we will be working to address in the coming months. Unfortunately, through this kind of a process we cannot respond directly to each and every concern because our responsibility under the law is quite limited. We will be actively sharing the feedback we are getting from this advisory committee with Assemblyman Hart, his staff, others in the state legislature, and ultimately with school districts to see if we can ameliorate many of these problems before they become tremendous stumbling blocks to effectively implementing the law.

I turn now to the proficiency assessment framework that must be produced. This framework has two major parts. The first part will attempt to recommend procedures. First, we will set forth recommendations for going through a process to achieve some consensus on proficiencies and proficiency standards within local districts. This, we feel, is very

important to highlight so that the districts are clearly aware of what we feel to be the intent of the law. Also, we want the districts to engage in a serious, meaningful dialogue in their local community on what that community considers important in the way of proficiencies and standards. We hope that this process will lead to the development of tests and measurements and remedial courses to reflect these standards.

The second set of procedures recommended in the framework will concern technical processes for constructing proficiency measures in the specified basic skill areas, and a description of recommended processes for actually setting or establishing standards. Again, under the law, the setting of a passing standard or an acceptable standard is a local responsibility. We cannot tell districts the level at which standards should be set, but we can recommend procedures by which they can set and interpret their own standards. The responsibility for adopting a particular level or standard is, as I have said, vested in each local governing board.

Finally, to emphasize that there are numerous models or options for assessing proficiency, the framework will include at least three assessment models that go beyond standard academic or paper-and-pencil skills. Again, we are not recommending any one of these models; we are simply presenting a number of alternatives so that local districts are aware that there is more than one way to assess proficiency. In addition to these recommended strategies or procedures, each of the assessment models will include an adequate number of sample assessment exercises. We are currently using the term "exercises" to get away from the rubric of "items" which tends to suggest only one model of measurement. Most likely the largest number of items to be produced will be in the more traditional mode of

academic assessment and basic skills assessments primarily because of the time and great expense involved in developing a large number of exercises in other areas. Of course, the material that will be distributed cannot possibly be a secure test or a model. We recognize this, and we will caution districts appropriately.

The second part of the proficiency framework will serve as a catalog of available resources which districts may draw upon in developing their standards. We want to emphasize that all wisdom in this area is certainly not vested in the State Department of Education. We hope to compile, for example, a listing of some districts in our state that other districts may want to consult with or visit. We will provide a listing of procedures and instruments that may be available from commercial or non-profit organizations, as well as a listing of individuals or organizations who are expert in the area of proficiency assessment. We expect that the resources listed will not be limited to California, but we do recognize the expense that districts would incur if they wish to draw upon experts from outside the state.

In conclusion, I would like to reemphasize the importance we attach to this legislation for our students. As we proceed through conferences such as this one, and as districts proceed to implement the law, we need to keep in mind that while we can perhaps buy the professional test instruments which would meet the precise intent of the law, what we cannot buy is the process which builds in our students the motivation and seriousness of purpose that seems to have been lost. If, in fact, the answer to our concern is simply vested in test materials, we probably have no problems. We could simply direct money into providing different kinds of

materials. We firmly believe, however, that the most important element in implementing AB 3408 is to attend to where we may have fallen down in building this motivation, seriousness of purpose, and to build a process to repair this flaw, a process which will go well beyond the simple act of creating a test or constructing measurement procedures.

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