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ABSTRACT

This report provides Minnesota legislators with background information on establishing state educational standards and periodic testing to measure student progress. Scientific management, the accountability movement, and the basic education movement were educational trends of the 1970's providing pressure on states to set standards to improve education. From 1975 through 1982, 39 states enacted some form of minimum competency testing programs. Supported by parents, employers, legislators and boards of education, but often opposed by traditional educational leaders, these programs have been hotly debated. Many states have scaled down or delayed their programs. There are currently a wide variety of minimum competency testing programs in 36 states. Thirteen have testing as a graduation requirement. Consensus is developing about characteristics of effective competency testing. Legal problems with testing programs revolve around three issues: adequate notice, test content, and impact on special groups. While Minnesota does not set and test state standards for its students, it has three programs to assist local schools in this area: (1) the Planning Evaluation and Reporting Law; (2) curriculum planning documents; and (3) a statewide educational assessment program that uses standardized tests in selected subject areas. Many Minnesota school districts have also initiated their own programs. The appendix is a chart, "Characteristics of Existing State Competency Testing Programs." (BS)

Student Performance Standards and Testing Programs:

Background Information for Legislators

Minnesota Senate

Senate Counsel and Research

March, 1984

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND TESTING PROGRAMS:

Background Information for Legislators

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March, 1984

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I. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two related proposals have recently come before the Minnesota Senate. Both would require establishment of educational standards for public school students and periodic testing to measure progress toward the standards.

Senate File 1223, sponsored by Senator Glen Taylor, would require all school districts to adopt methods of assessing student progress in the basic skills - including at least reading, writing, and mathematical skills. The State Department of Education would help to develop the assessment methods, but local districts would retain complete control. The law would require that districts relate the assessment methods directly to their instructional programs.

Ruth Randall, Minnesota Commissioner of Education, has proposed that the state adopt a set of "learner outcomes" that would describe what students should learn in all subjects and at all grade levels. She has also proposed that the state develop "Minnesota Achievement Tests" which would measure progress toward the learner outcomes. School districts could either use the state standards and tests, or adopt more rigid local standards. This proposal has not yet been introduced as a bill, and many details remain to be determined. However, the preliminary proposal suggests tighter state control over standards than would result from Senator Taylor's bill.

This paper is not intended to describe or evaluate either of these proposals. Rather, it is intended to provide background information that will aid in understanding and analyzing the proposals. Section II describes some historical roots of the proposals - past trends in educational management and public attitudes that have produced pressure to adopt similar proposals in Minnesota and others states. Section III describes the debate over and development of minimum competency testing programs, which were enacted in most states during the late '70s. Both of the Minnesota proposals are similar, but not identical, to minimum competency testing. Section III also summarizes some characteristics of the existing programs in the 36 states which currently require some form of competency testing; additional summary information is included in the appendix. Section IV is entitled "Beyond Minimum Competency Testing." It describes the changing character of the debate on standardized testing and outlines common conclusions about characteristics of effective testing programs. Section V summarizes some legal implications of state testing programs. Finally, Section VI describes some existing state and local programs which are related to these proposals.

Following is an Executive Summary of the major points covered in each section.

Section II: Historical Roots of Standards and Testing Programs

1. Proposals to expand standard-setting and testing in the schools are closely related to past trends in education management and public attitudes toward the schools.

2. One historical root is the concept of scientific management - the idea that schools should be managed in a more scientific or systematic way. This idea is at least 140 years old, and has appeared in many different forms. It seemed to grow in popularity during the '70s.

3. The "accountability movement" also became prominent during the '70s. The basic idea behind this movement is that participants in the educational process should be able to prove that they are achieving desired results, and should suffer negative consequences if they aren't. Calls for greater accountability were spurred by a growing public perception that the schools were not doing a good job.

4. Also during the '70s, proponents of basic education argued that the schools were trying to do too many things, and that they should concentrate more on developing students' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Section III: Minimum Competency Testing

1. From 1975 through 1982, 39 states enacted some form of minimum competency testing programs. Minnesota is not among these states, and neither of the proposals described earlier fits the traditional concept of a minimum competency test. Nevertheless, the history and background of minimum competency testing may provide a useful background for understanding the Minnesota proposals.

2. The rapid spread of minimum competency testing was a startling policy development. It was accompanied by a vigorous debate.

3. Minimum competency testing has been supported by a broad coalition of parents, employers, legislators, and state and local boards of education. They have argued that minimum competency testing will provide the following benefits and positive effects.

a. The existence of clear instructional goals will lead to a more consistent and rational curriculum.

b. The tests will force schools to concentrate more effort on teaching basic skills.

c. Test results will give schools evidence of the relative effectiveness of various instructional practices, and will help in planning curriculum changes.

d. The results will help schools to identify students who need remedial education or other additional help.

e. The results will give the public better information on the relative effectiveness of various teachers, schools, and school districts.

f. Ultimately, student performance in the basic skills will improve.

g. If most of the above benefits are realized, public confidence in the schools will improve.

4. Minimum competency testing has generally been opposed by traditional education leaders, including teachers, administrators, professors, and researchers.

5. Opponents have cited numerous practical difficulties with minimum competency testing, including the following:

   a. It is very difficult to reach agreement on what is to be tested.

   b. It is even more difficult to define a minimum level of competence and to establish a minimum passing test score.

   c. Handicapped students pose difficult problems for testing. If they are given the same tests as everyone else, they will be more likely to fail; this may violate federal law. But if they are excused from the tests, charges of discrimination may result.

   d. Some important goals of schooling are very difficult to test, at least through objective standardized tests.

e. Standardized tests are often not closely tied to what students are taught.

f. Tests may be biased against minority students.

g. Even the best tests are subject to errors from many sources. When test scores are used to classify individual students, some incorrect classifications are inevitable.

6. Opponents have also predicted a list of negative effects of minimum competency testing, including the following:

a. Powerful incentives will exist to concentrate on the narrow skills measured by the tests. Subject matter and skills not included on the tests will be gradually de-emphasized.

b. The push to provide "minimally competent" students may mean less emphasis on challenging the brightest students and on helping those who will never reach the minimum standards.

c. Because of errors in testing, some competent students may be unfairly denied a diploma or promotion to the next grade. Other students who need extra help may be overlooked.

d. If students with low scores are separated for remedial instruction, the result may be increased racial and class segregation within schools.

e. Standardized testing may result in greater central control of education.

7. Proponents of minimum competency testing seemed to win the early rounds of this debate, as many states adopted programs quickly. But the movement has slowed down since 1978.

8. Many states which enacted programs during the late '70s have encountered implementation problems, delays, and court challenges. Some states have scaled down their original programs or adjusted the timetables to delay implementation.

9. Thirty-six states currently require some form of minimum competency testing. Details of the programs vary widely. Only 13 states currently require that high school graduates pass a minimum competency test.

Section IV: Beyond Minimum Competency Testing

1. As the debate over competency testing has continued into the '80s, many states have broadened their school improvement strategies to include other programs, as well as testing.

2. A new middle ground has emerged in the debate. It is led by individuals who recognize that competency testing has dangers and limitations, but stress that it can have positive results if designed and administered properly.

3. Consensus seems to have formed about what it is is that makes competency testing effective. Following is a list of often-cited characteristics of effective testing programs.

   a. The tests should be directly related to a school's curriculum (i.e. they should test what has been taught).

   b. Students should know in advance what types of questions will be on the tests.

   c. A student's test score should never be the sole criterion for high school graduation, grade promotion, or other important decisions.

   d. Schools should find effective ways to help students who score poorly on the tests.

   e. Schools and teachers should study test results for evidence of strengths and weaknesses in their programs, and should use the results to plan changes in curriculum and teaching techniques.

   f. Schools should find ways to challenge students to achieve well beyond the minimum standards.

Section V: Legal Implications of Testing Programs

1. There are potential legal problems with some testing programs. The degree and nature of the problems depends on the specific characteristics of the program.

2. Generally, if there are no adverse consequences to students who score poorly on the tests, there is little likelihood of litigation or court findings against the tests. But if test scores are used

to deny important benefits, such as a high school diploma, court challenges are much more likely.

3. Because adoption of competency testing requirements is relatively recent, there has been little litigation on the subject. Furthermore, some of the past court actions may not be relevant to other states. This makes it difficult to predict the legal consequences of a Minnesota testing program.

4. One firmly established legal principle that has emerged from litigation is the right of students to adequate notice of testing requirements.

5. Another clear principle is that tests must be based on materials actually taught in school.

6. The impact of testing on handicapped students and minority students could be a source of legal problems.

Section VI: Existing Standards and Testing Programs in Minnesota

1. Although Minnesota does not set statewide educational standards or require standardized tests of all students, the state has several programs which help or encourage local schools to set their own standards and to test their students.

   a. The Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting (PER) law requires all school districts to develop education policies, goals, and instructional plans; to conduct an annual evaluation of progress toward the goals; and to report results to the public and the State Board of Education.

   b. The Department of Education publishes a series of curriculum planning documents called "Some Essential Learner Outcomes," or SELOs. The SELOs provide model goal statements which districts may use to develop their own curriculum goals.

   c. The Department administers a statewide educational assessment program. Standardized tests in selected subject areas are given annually to a statewide sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 11. The results are widely publicized, and are used to evaluate and

improve curriculum. The program also includes a local assessment option, which allows districts to give the standardized tests to all of their students. The Department helps districts to analyze the results and use them for instructional improvement.

2. Many Minnesota school districts have acted on their own to develop instructional standards and testing programs. Some examples are summarized below.

   a. The Bemidji public schools are developing written objectives for every subject area, course, and grade; and tests to measure student progress on each objective.

   b. The Minneapolis school district is beginning to implement a series of "benchmark tests." Scores on these tests will eventually be used, along with other information, to determine eligibility for high school graduation and for promotion from selected grades.

   c. School District 622 - in North St. Paul, Maplewood, and Oakdale - has developed "Basic Skills Tests" in reading, writing, and mathematics. Beginning this year, high school seniors who receive a passing score on all three tests will receive a special notation on their diplomas.

   d. The Roseville area schools have developed district-wide goals, program goals for both the elementary and secondary levels, and specific objectives and indicators for each elementary program area and each secondary course. The district is also implementing a program called "learning standards," which requires all senior high school students to take reading and mathematics tests and a writing exercise. Students who don't meet a predetermined standard must take an extra course in the appropriate subject area.

II. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF STANDARDS AND TESTING PROGRAMS

Proposals to expand standard-setting and testing in the schools are not new. They are closely related to past trends in educational management and public attitudes toward the schools. This section describes some of these related past trends.

Scientific Management

One historical root of these proposals is the idea that schools should be managed in a more scientific or systematic way. This idea is at least 140 years old (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 473), and has been expressed in different ways by many different people. The recurring themes, however, are that schools should regularly measure progress toward centrally determined goals, and that systematic management will help schools to accomplish the goals as efficiently as possible.

This is essentially an industrial approach to school management; carried to an extreme, it implies that teachers are much like factory workers who use routine procedures to maximize production of a standard output. It can be contrasted with an intellectual approach, in which teachers are viewed as autonomous professionals who seek creative ways to enlighten and guide their students. Lazarus contends that these two approaches to school management have vied for popularity since the turn of the century, and that

the scientific approach came to dominate during the '70s (Lazarus, 1981, pp. 13-14).

The rising popularity of the scientific approach resulted in numerous attempts to apply general management plans to education. Schools tried management by objectives (MBO); planning, programming, budgeting systems (PPBS); systems analysis; zero-based budgeting (ZBB); operations analysis; and a host of other techniques. In most cases, the techniques did not live up to their promises. The reason may be that schools are more complex than the industrial and government organizations for which the techniques were designed (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 473). Or it may be that the techniques are ill-advised in almost any organization (Wildavsky, 1979, pp. 26-39).

More recently, there have been attempts to devise scientific management plans specifically for schools. These have included competency-based education, performance-based education, learner verification, mastery learning, and many others (Wise, 1977, pp.3-4). There are differences among these management plans, but they all emphasize the outcomes of education and measurement of student achievement.

Accountability

The rise of scientific management schemes during the '70s went hand in hand with what has been called the "accountability movement." Arguments for accountability have taken many different forms. But the basic idea is that

participants in the educational process should be able to prove that they are achieving desired results, and should suffer negative consequences if they aren't. For example, administrators should be able to prove that they are spending public money effectively. Teachers should be able to prove that they are teaching students effectively. Students should be able to prove that they are learning something. And high school graduates should be able to prove that they possess certain skills.

The primary force behind the accountability movement was a growing public perception that the schools were not doing a good job. Declines in average test scores, especially on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), contributed greatly to this perception. Frequent reports of illiterate high school graduates and chaotic, undisciplined schools fanned the flame further. By 1980, public opinion polls reflected overwhelming dissatisfaction with the schools, and broad consensus that major improvements were needed (Cooper, 1981, p. 5).

Many researchers have concluded that public dissatisfaction is not supported by objective evidence (Haney and Madaus, 1978, pp. 474-475). There are many explanations for the decline in SAT scores, and the schools may not be the chief culprit. After reviewing trends in test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Cooper (1981, pp. 5-6) concluded that "the best data available...show some improvements and some declines

and probably on average, all the results taken together, a very slight decline." Nevertheless, the prevailing public attitude toward the schools has remained negative. The recent spate of national reports on education has probably contributed further to this attitude.

Calls for accountability have also been spurred by public concern over rising tax rates and the cost of education. Voters have seemed reluctant to spend more on education unless they receive evidence that their investment is yielding a fair return (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 476).

The federal government responded to the accountability movement by requiring school districts to provide detailed evaluations of federally funded programs (Wise, 1977, pp. 16-17). But the most significant policy response in most states was to increase or institute standardized testing.

Basic Education

During the '70s, public sentiment grew for another idea, often called "back to the basics." Proponents of basic education argued that the schools were trying to do too many things, and that the curriculum had grown to include too many subjects, particularly in secondary schools. Schools had added or expanded vocational education, consumer education, driver education, sex education, new athletic programs, and a host of other programs. Proponents of basic education claimed that declining test scores were at least partially caused by this

dilution of the curriculum. They advocated greater concentration on basic academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

III. MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING

The pressures for scientific management plans, educational accountability, and basic education all seemed to grow during the '70s. The result was the fairly rapid adoption of minimum competency testing in most states. From 1975 through 1982, 39 states adopted some type of minimum competency testing program (Pipho, 1983, p. 2). Thus, Minnesota is among the small number of states that has not joined the "minimum competency testing movement."

The phrase "minimum competency testing" has been used to describe many different programs. The traditional view, seemingly held by most people, is that minimum competency testing includes at least the following three characteristics:

1. All students in one or more grades statewide are required to take the same standardized test.
2. A single score, representing the minimum acceptable level of competence, has been determined in advance.
3. If a student's score is below the minimum, the student is denied a high school diploma or promotion to the next grade, and may be placed in a remedial program.

In reality, many of the minimum competency testing programs enacted in other states do not include all of these characteristics.

Neither of the Minnesota proposals described in the introduction fits this traditional definition, and neither of them has been called a minimum competency testing proposal. However, there are at least two reasons why the history and background of minimum competency testing can contribute to an understanding of the Minnesota proposals. First, there are important similarities. Like minimum competency testing programs, both of the Minnesota proposals would require testing to determine whether students met predetermined standards. In fact, the Minnesota proposals might be viewed as more sophisticated plans that have evolved from the past experience with minimum competency testing. Second, because of the prominence of minimum competency testing, most of the recent literature on standards and testing programs is specifically tied to minimum competency testing. Much of this literature is relevant to the Minnesota proposals.

The rapid spread of minimum competency testing was a startling policy development. One observer (Lazarus, 1981, p. 6) made the following comments:

> Educators are accustomed to sweeping changes overnight... But many competency testing programs were started by state legislatures, bodies not often given to swift and consistent action. It is remarkable to see so many states passing laws, which have at least some resemblance to one another, at a rate of several states per year.... Competency testing must appear to hold special promise for so many states to climb on board so fast.

Although minimum competency testing has spread rapidly, it has not been universally accepted. In fact, there has been a vigorous and sharply polarized debate on the subject. The programs have been supported by a broad coalition of parents, employers, legislators, and state and local boards of education. However, many of the traditional educational leaders - including teachers, school administrators, education professors, and researchers - have opposed and resisted minimum competency testing. The following pages summarize some of the common arguments for and against minimum competency testing.

Arguments in Favor of Minimum Competency Testing

Some of the supporters of minimum competency testing have billed it as a panacea for the schools' greatest problems. Various supporters have claimed that it could "restore the meaning of the high school diploma,... rebuild crumbling public confidence in the schools" (Down, 1979, p. 4); cause students to "develop more positive self-concepts" (Popham, 1981, p. 91); and deliver a host of other benefits. Other supporters have been more cautious, recognizing that "no mere testing program could accomplish so much" (Gray, 1980, p. 4).

The basic beliefs that seem to guide most supporters of minimum competency testing are that student performance has declined - particularly in the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation - and that minimum competency

testing will help to raise standards and improve performance. Following is a list of the most often-cited specific benefits and positive effects.[1]

1. The existence of clear instructional goals will lead to a more consistent and rational curriculum.
2. The tests will force schools to concentrate more effort on teaching basic skills.
3. Test results will give schools evidence of the relative effectiveness of various instructional practices, and will help in planning curriculum changes.
4. The results will help schools to identify students who could benefit from remedial education or other specialized programs.
5. The results will give the public better information on the relative effectiveness of various teachers, schools, and school districts.
6. Ultimately, student performance in the basic skills will improve.
7. If most of the above benefits are realized, public confidence in the schools will improve.

Arguments Against Minimum Competency Testing

The arguments in favor of minimum competency testing are fairly simple and logical, and the basic idea seems intuitively appealing to most people. In fact, 65 percent

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[1]This list was compiled from the following sources: Down, 1979, p. 4; Feldmesser, 1979, pp. 18-19; Gray, 1980, pp. 6-7; Pipho, 1983, p. 1; and Popham, 1981, p. 91.

of the adults surveyed in a 1980 Gallup poll favored a standardized nationwide test for high school graduation (Cooper, 1981, p. 7).

By contrast, the opponents of minimum competency testing - chiefly education professionals and researchers - have used arguments that are more subtle and complex. Thus it is difficult to summarize their arguments in a neat and concise list such as that on the preceding page.

Opponents of minimum competency testing have generally argued that the schools' problems are not as severe as most people believe; that there are practical difficulties which make it impossible to implement minimum competency testing as planned; and that the unintended negative effects of the programs will be worse than the problems they are intended to solve. The remainder of this section describes some of the practical difficulties and negative effects often cited by opponents.

Practical difficulties. Opponents of minimum competency testing have claimed that the concept is simple only because it ignores a lot of complex problems that must be faced when the programs are implemented. The first problem is the difficulty of reaching agreement on what should be tested. Minimum competency testing programs are often based on the notion that all students should possess the skills necessary to "function in society." But as Wise (1977, p. 28) points out, this assumes "that it is possible to define 'functioning in society' in a way that would generate

consensus, a most unlikely prospect. It further supposes that the attributes of 'functioning in society' can be studied and made to reveal 'competencies' which can be taught, another unlikely prospect." Other critics have pointed out that research and public opinion polls reveal a great divergence of opinions on what the goals of schooling should be. This will inevitably produce disagreements on what should be tested.

A second problem is the difficulty of defining a minimum level of competence, and of translating that into a minimum passing test score. In theory, minimum competency tests are criterion-referenced; this means that each student's score is compared to some fixed standard which represents society's consensus on the minimum level of competence. But in practice, there may be no objective way to set a minimum score. Glass, after examining six methods of determining criterion scores, concluded that "every attempt to determine a criterion score is either blatantly arbitrary or derives from a set of arbitrary premises" (Glass, 1977, p. 42). Several observers of minimum competency testing programs claim that minimum scores are usually determined by political considerations; if the tests are to be accepted, the minimum score must be set at a level that fails some students but not too many (Lazarus, 1981, pp. 39-40).

A third problem relates to handicapped students. Students who have learning disabilities, mental handicaps,

and certain types of physical handicaps will be much less likely than other students to pass a standardized test. One simple solution would be to completely excuse such students from the tests. But this could bring charges of discrimination from nonhandicapped students who were denied a diploma or grade promotion because of their test scores. A second simple solution would be to hold handicapped students to the same standards as their peers. But this would be contrary to the concept of individualized special education; and it probably would violate federal law, which "prohibits the use of 'basic tests' given all pupils as a means for the 'evaluation' of special education students" (Cooper, 1981, p. 11). The best solution is probably to make the decision on testing a part of each handicapped student's individualized education plan; depending on individual needs, a student could be given the standard test, given a modified version of the same test, or evaluated through different means. This procedure might work well for handicapped students, but it still could be contested by a student who claimed to have special needs but was not officially classified as handicapped.

Even if these three problems could be solved, critics argue that there are serious problems with the tests themselves. First, some important goals of schooling are very difficult to test. Most minimum competency tests are true-false, multiple choice, or short answer tests. These forms of testing are relatively easy to administer and

score (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 471); they work very well for testing of vocabulary, reading, and computational skills. But they are much less appropriate for testing of skills in writing, literature, art, and many other subjects; or for testing of higher-level skills such as synthesis, analysis, and integration. Such skills are much more difficult to test. In fact, it may be that "for the list of competencies already specified in several states, no good measuring instruments are available" (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 472).

Some critics have taken these arguments a step further, pointing out that the areas where testing is weakest also may be the areas where students need the greatest improvement (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 479). Unfortunately, decisions on what skills to test are often based on what is easiest to test. Thus, minimum competency testing may create incentives for schools and students to put more emphasis on "the minimal skills of functional literacy" and less emphasis on "the maximal skills of thinking, creating, and problem-solving," when the opposite emphasis may be needed (Cooper, 1981, p. 6).

A second weakness of standardized tests is that they often are not closely tied to what students are taught. In most states, including Minnesota, local schools have considerable control over curriculum. Thus, the degree to which a standardized statewide test matches the local

curriculum can vary greatly among schools (Lazarus, 1981, pp. 48-49).

A third weakness often cited is that tests may be biased against minority students (Holbrook, 1982, p. 35). This belief has prompted the NAACP and other minority groups to oppose minimum competency tests in some states, and to challenge the tests in court (Crosier, 1982, p. 9).

Finally, critics argue that even if it were possible to construct unbiased tests that measured all of the important goals of schooling and were well linked to the local curriculum, the tests would still be subject to errors from many sources (Lazarus, 1981, pp. 50-53). Even the best tests are not perfectly accurate and objective. When using aggregate results for large samples of students, the size of the errors can be minimized. But when each student's score on a single test is used to classify that student, the inevitable result will be a substantial number of incorrect classifications.

In summing up the weaknesses of testing, Haney and Madaus (1978, p. 472) conclude: "It seems clear that if the enthusiasm for minimum-competency testing were a direct reflection of our competence in creating such tests, the movement would not have grown as far and as fast as it has." A panel of nine "leading educators and scholars" assembled by the National Academy of Education reached a similar conclusion. They stated that use of minimum competency tests as a requirement for high school graduation would not

work, "for the scaffolding of existing test design is too weak to carry such an emotionally laden and ambiguous burden" (National School Boards Association, 1978, p. 12).

Negative effects. Critics predict that minimum competency testing will have negative effects on curriculum and teaching. They claim that the sanctions attached to the tests will create powerful incentives for administrators, teachers, and students to concentrate their efforts on the narrow skills measured by the tests. Their fear is that teachers will "teach to the tests;" "and since the tests are narrow and invalid ... the tests are like to result in narrowly conceived and ineffective instruction" (Cooper, 1981, p. 5). Subject matters and skills that are not included on the tests will be gradually de-emphasized and pushed out of the curriculum. Furthermore, the push to produce "minimally competent" students may mean less emphasis on challenging the brightest students and on helping those who will never reach the minimum standards (Lazarus, 1981, p. 73). The ultimate result, claim the critics, may be "a desiccated curriculum" (Cooper, 1981, p. 12) and "an end to the quest for excellence in our schools" (Lazarus, 1981, p. 28).

Critics also warn of negative effects on students. Because of inherent errors in testing, some students will be misclassified. Some competent students will be unfairly denied a diploma or promotion to the next grade, and some students who need extra help will be overlooked (Lazarus,

1981, pp. 19-20). Even if students are classified accurately, the effects may be negative. "If these students who are behind are separated for remedial instruction, then the minimum competency testing movement could produce an increasing racial and class segregation, even within desegregated schools" (Myers, 1981, p. 169). The tests will be helpful to low achieving students only if schools can find effective ways to improve their achievement. If not, the tests "may simply supply a new means for tracking students who most need help into second-class educational programs and stigmatizing them as inferior citizens" (Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 480).

Finally, some observers warn that minimum competency testing will contribute to an unhealthy trend towards centralization of education. Because of their indirect effects on curriculum, standardized tests may provide a very efficient means for states to bring about curriculum changes while ostensibly maintaining local control (Wise, 1977, p. 29; Haney and Madaus, 1978, p. 476).

Results of the Debate

This highly polarized debate raged on into the early'80s, and still continues in some states. Supporters of minimum competency testing have continued to claim that it is a simple, common-sense idea that will help to improve student achievement. Opponents, meanwhile, have continued to claim that the idea is not as simple as it seems. They

have argued that there are many practical difficulties which will make minimum competency testing nearly impossible to implement as planned; and they have warned that the programs will have unintended negative effects that may be worse than the school's current problems.

Initially, the supporters seemed to win the debate, and states acted quickly to adopt minimum competency testing programs. Twelve states had adopted some form of minimum competency testing by the end of 1976, and an additional twenty-five states enacted programs from 1977 through 1978. The rapid spread of the programs -- coupled with widespread public acceptance of the concept - put critics of minimum competency testing on the defensive. Lazarus (1981, p. 60) complained: "The only people without ready solutions, it appears, are those who best understand the problems."

But the minimum competency testing movement has stalled somewhat in the '80s. Only two states have added new programs since 1978 (Pipho, 1983, p. 2). Some of the states which enacted programs in the late '70s have found they acted too quickly, giving insufficient attention to the warnings of critics. Legislatures and state boards of education acted "...without adequate preparation, without coordinating the tests with the curricular goals of the schools, and without attention to helping students who do poorly on the tests" (Holbrook, 1982, p. 36). States soon encountered some of the implementation problems about which critics had warned.

States also found that it took longer than anticipated to implement the programs. "In the mid-seventies, the laws required tests to be developed in one year. Today, most states know that the process takes two or three years" (Pipho, 1983, p. 4).

Some of the programs were challenged in the courts. In a few states, courts issued injunctions halting implementation until the validity of the tests was demonstrated (Crosier, 1982, p. 9). A Florida court delayed for four years the use of test results as a graduation requirement.

Despite these setbacks, competency testing programs have not disappeared. Some states have adjusted their original timetables to allow more time for implementation. Other states have scaled down their programs by eliminating testing in some grades or eliminating testing for high school graduation (Pipho, 1983, pp. 2-3). Policymakers are generally acting with more caution and restraint. As early as 1978, Pipho (1978, p. 588) observed that "...the legislators are moving much more carefully. They are holding more hearings; they are reviewing bills in greater detail; they are giving more consideration to additional studies when needed; in general, they are asking more questions."

Current Programs in Other States

The appendix at the end of this report summarizes some characteristics of the programs in the 36 states that currently require some form of minimum competency testing.[2] The programs have many different names (e.g., achievement testing, competency standards, proficiency testing, educational accountability act, basic skills testing), and details of the programs vary considerably. However, the Education Commission of the States considers all of them to be some form of minimum competency testing. Virtually all of the programs include a state mandate to test all students in one or more grades, and a requirement to set minimum standards, either statewide or locally.

Many advocates of minimum competency testing suggest that the tests be used to determine eligibility for high school graduation and grade-to-grade promotion, and to identify students needing remedial instruction. But the states have been cautious in mandating these uses of the tests. Of the 36 states listed in the appendix, only 13

[2]The Education Committee of the States (ECS) has reported that 39 states have adopted minimum competency testing programs (Pipho, 1983 p. 2). But two of the states only required one-time tests which have not been repeated, and one state (Michigan) has a program which ECS calls "a state assessment program... not (to) be confused with a state minimum competency testing program" (Pipho, 1981, p. 9). Thus only 36 states have minimum competency testing programs that are currently in effect.

currently require that high school students pass a test in order to graduate. Three states plan to add such a requirement in the future, and five states give local districts the option of using the tests for this purpose. Fourteen states require that test results be used to identify students needing remedial instruction. Only two states currently require use of test results in grade promotion decisions. One state plans to add this requirement in 1985 and four states give local districts the option of doing so.

In some of the states, test results are used only for public information or to guide curriculum decisions. These uses are similar to the purposes of Minnesota's statewide assessment program, described later in this paper.

Most of the states use a uniform statewide test, with standards set by the state board of education, state department of education, or some other state group. But local school districts have complete control over the tests and standards in ten states, and partial control in seven other states.

Roughly half of the 36 programs were enacted by the state legislature and half by the state board or state department of education. In some states, more than one of these groups played a role in adoption of the programs.

The states also vary in the subjects or skill areas that are included on the tests. Almost all of the states test math and reading skills, and most states test writing

or composition skills. A few states also require tests in subjects such as language, spelling, speaking, listening, democratic government, citizenship, and free enterprise.

IV. BEYOND MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING

As the debate on minimum competency testing has continued into the '80s, two significant changes have occurred. First, many states have recognized that testing is only one of many methods for improving schools, and have developed more comprehensive school improvement strategies that include other programs as well as testing. "As the accountability issue matured,... testing concerns often led to a variety of other concerns, including upgrading the education work force, strengthening the instructional program and initiating school improvement efforts" (Dougherty, 1983, p. v).

The second significant change is that a "middle ground" has emerged in the debate, led by "teachers, parents, and legislators who recognize that minimum competency testing is no panacea but is here to stay" (Holbrook, 1982, p. 34). These individuals recognize the dangers and limitations of minimum competency testing. But at the same time they stress that testing programs, if designed and administered carefully, can have positive results.

Characteristics of Effective Testing Programs

From the experience of other states with minimum competency testing, and from continuing debate on the subject, a consensus has begun to emerge on what it is that

makes competency testing effective. Various writers have published lists of essential characteristics. Although the lists vary somewhat, there seems to be a fair degree of consensus about the following points.[3]

1. The tests should be closely linked to the schools' curriculums; they should test what has been taught. This may require local development of tests or at least a local option to modify tests, since curriculums vary greatly among schools.

2. Students should know in advance what types of questions will be on the tests. This could be accomplished by providing students with sample questions, by giving similar tests at several times during a student's schooling, or both.

3. A student's score on a single test should never be the sole criterion for high school graduation, grade promotion, or other important decisions. Students who fail should be given several chances to pass, and schools should use other information - including performance in classes and professional judgment of teachers - in making such decisions.

4. Schools must find effective ways to help students who score poorly on the tests. This may require that more attention and money be devoted to remedial programs.

5. Schools and individual teachers should study test results for evidence of strengths and weaknesses in their programs, and should use the results to plan changes in curriculum and teaching techniques.

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[3]This list was compiled from the following sources: Gray, 1980, pp. 6-16; Popham, 1981, p. 90; Holbrook, 1981, p. 37; National School Boards Association, 1979, pp. 32-33; Haney and Madaus, 1978, pp. 478-481; and Cooper, 1981, pp. 14-16.

6. Schools should find ways to challenge students to achieve well beyond the minimum standards.

Some people might make a seventh suggestion - that the programs be called something other than minimum competency testing. Because of the negative connotations associated with that label, many supporters of standardized testing are now making conscious efforts to disassociate their proposals from minimum competency testing. However, a program which includes all of the characteristics listed above would be different - in substance as well as name - from the traditional view of minimum competency testing described earlier in this paper.

This list of characteristics will not guarantee a successful testing program. However, it may help policymakers to avoid some of the greatest dangers of competency testing, and to take advantage of some of the greatest potential benefits.

Furthermore, even the best testing programs cannot guarantee educational change or improvement. As Lazarus (1981, p. 7) has observed: "A test by itself cannot effect change; it can only record whether change is taking place. One might as well expect to cool a room by putting a thermometer in it." Well-designed testing programs may, however, provide valuable information that can be used to guide school improvement.

V. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF TESTING PROGRAMS

There are potential legal problems associated with some student testing programs. The degree and nature of the problems vary according to the specific characteristics of the program. Generally, if there are no adverse consequences to students based on their test scores, there is little likelihood of litigation or of a court finding against the testing program.

Conversely, if an important right or reasonably expected benefit (e.g., a high school diploma) is denied based on a student's test score, there is a much stronger likelihood of a court challenge. In addition, a court is more likely to scrutinize the test and the testing procedure.

As explained in Section III, most state competency testing programs are relatively new and some of them have not yet been fully implemented. As a result, there has been little litigation upon which to make a prediction of the legal consequences of a particular proposal.

In a few states, courts have enjoined the state from denying a diploma based on test results. However, there are three factors which may limit the legal implications of these cases. First, because the decisions were made by trial courts, they are binding only on the parties involved. Second, the court may simply be saying that denial of a

diploma is a severe action and it wishes the status quo to continue until the court has heard the issues fully. Third, the state would probably have a difficult time showing its interest would be harmed by delay, while students denied a diploma can more easily show harm to themselves.

There appear to be three primary legal issues related to state testing programs. They are:

1. Adequate notice of testing,
2. Content of the tests, and
3. Impact on special groups such as handicapped and minority students.

The remainder of this section describes these issues in more detail.[4]

Adequate Notice. The right to adequate notice of testing as a requirement of receiving a high school diploma is the most straightforward and firmly established principle to arise out of competency testing litigation. Due process or fundamental fairness means that students must have fair warning, an opportunity to prepare for the test, and time to prepare for changed graduation requirements. Two years notice and three years notice were held adequate by two courts. Less than two years notice and one and one-half years notice were held inadequate by two other courts.

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[4]Much of the remainder of this section is based on information from Citron, 1983.

Handicapped students may need more notice than non-handicapped students, particularly if an aspect of the handicapping condition is slow learning. The individual education plan (IEP) may be used to address the question of whether or not a student is to take the test and whether special preparation is needed. Records of parental discussion and consent to preparation for testing may be vital to show that notice requirements have been met.

Test Content. The equal protection and due process clauses of the United States Constitution require that testing must be based on material actually taught in school, according to the leading case about minimum competency testing. The burden is on the state to demonstrate that the test was a fair test of what was taught. In Florida this involved a survey of every teacher in the state, a survey of school district reports, and a student survey. Although it is not necessary to show that every teacher finished every lesson and assigned every problem in the curriculum, the state must show that what is tested was taught.

Impact on Special Groups. Testing may affect special groups such as the handicapped and racial minorities in a disproportionate way. Two of the four cases researched involved challenges by handicapped students who were required to pass the test before receiving a diploma regardless of the handicapping condition. Statutes require a "free appropriate public education" and at least one case had held that the right is not denied when the students are

unable to pass a required test. Courts have also held that academic standards do not have to be lowered to accomodate properly classified handicapped students who, because of their handicaps, cannot meet the standards established by the state. Continued litigation in this area may be expected because of the importance of a diploma to obtain employment and because of the frequency of litigation about the rights of handicapped students. School officials in New York have indicated their intention to appeal an adverse ruling to the United States Supreme Court. (School Law News, 1983, p. 5).

Racial or cultural bias of a test may be suggested if disproportionately large groups of minorities fail. If bias is alleged, courts may well examine the test and the surrounding circumstances. If there is intent to discriminate, of which evidence may be inferred from historical background and events leading up to imposition of the test, the testing may be struck down. Higher failure rate alone has not been held to be discrimination per se; however it produces grounds for concern.

These conclusions are based upon the four leading cases about minimum competency testing. Each case involved the receipt of a high school diploma conditioned upon several factors, one of which was passing such a test. Thus far there appears to be no litigation of significance in states which do not deny diplomas.

Cases

Debra P. v. Turlington, 474 F. Supp. 244 (M.D. Fla. 1979), aff'd 644 F. 2d 397 (5th Cir. 1981), rehearing denied, 654 F. 2d 1079 (5th Cir. 1981), on remand, 564 F. Supp. 177 (1983).

Anderson v. Banks, 520 F. Supp. 472 (S.D. Ga. 1981), modified, 540 F. Supp. 761 (S.D. Ga. 1982).

Brookhart v. Illinois State Board of Education, 534 F. Supp 725 (C.D. Ill. 1982), rev'd 697 F. 2d 179 (7th Cir. 1983).

Board of Education of Northport-East Northport v. Ambach, 107 Misc. 2d 830, 436 N.Y.S. 2d 564 (Sup. Ct. 1981), modified, 90 A.D. 2d 227 (App. Div. 1982), 458 N.Y.S. 2d 680 (A.D. 1982).

VI. EXISTING STANDARDS AND TESTING PROGRAMS IN MINNESOTA

The state of Minnesota does not attempt to set common instructional goals or standards for all of its public school students, nor does it require that all students take any form of standardized test. However, the state has several programs which help and encourage schools to set their own goals or standards and to test their students. And many local school districts have developed excellent standards and testing programs on their own. This chapter describes some of these existing statewide and local programs.

Statewide Programs

Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting. In 1976, the Minnesota Legislature passed legislation which has become known as the Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting (PER) law. This legislation (M.S. 123.74-123.742) was intended "to more adequately inform and involve local school district residents... in planning and evaluation of curriculum programs within their school district" (Minnesota Department of Education, Office of Planning and Policy Research, 1983, p. 2). The law requires all local school districts to do the following.

1. School boards must adopt a written educational policy which establishes:

   a. educational goals for the district,
   b. a process for achieving the goals, and

c. procedures for evaluating and reporting progress toward the goals.

2. Boards must review the policy each year and adopt necessary revisions.

3. School district staff must develop an instructional plan to implement the goals established in the district policy. The law encourages adoption of measurable instructional objectives to assist in directing and measuring progress toward the goals.

4. Districts must conduct an annual evaluation of progress toward the goals. The evaluation must incorporate both of the following:

   a. "professional evaluations," using test results, other performance data, and judgement of the district staff, and

   b. "consumer evaluations," using opinions of students, parents, and other district residents.

5. School boards are required to review the evaluation results and develop improvement plans to address goals that were not met.

6. An annual report - including the educational policy, evaluation results, and plans for improvement - must be made available to district residents through media releases and other means. A copy of the report must also be sent to the State Board of Education.

7. The law encourages boards to appoint a curriculum advisory committee to ensure active community participation in this entire process.

Some Essential Learner Outcomes. The Department of Education publishes a series of documents called "Some Essential Learner Outcomes," or SELOs. The Department describes SELOs as "a new approach to curriculum development..." intended to "provide assistance in planning instructional programs" (Minnesota Department of Education, Elementary and Secondary Education Section). Separate

documents have been published for 18 subject areas. Each document contains a list of "significant knowledge statements" within the subject area. These statements are designed as models for local instructional goals. School districts are encouraged to select from the goals in the SELOs, expand upon them, and modify them, so that their local instructional goals are tailored to the community. The Department suggests that districts can use SELOs to help in the PER process. The goal statements contained in the SELOs are also used to develop test items and report results in the Statewide Educational Assessment Program, described below.

Statewide Educational Assessment Program. The Department of Education administers statewide tests annually to a sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 11. The basic purposes of the program, as stated by the Department (Minnesota Department of Education, Assessment Section) are:

1. To provide valid and reliable data on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Minnesota students.
2. To provide a means to evaluate curriculum strengths and weaknesses.
3. To provide a means to focus developmental activities to improve student learning.
4. To measure changes in student performance over time.
5. To provide materials, data, and technical assistance to local school districts engaging in a process of curriculum evaluation...
6. To provide a relevant means for local school districts to meet PER requirements.

Each year, the Department tests students in two or three subject areas. Most subject areas are tested once every four years. The results are carefully analyzed and widely reported. Since the purpose of this process is curriculum evaluation and analysis, rather than evaluation of individual students, only group results are reported.

Approximately one-third of the items in each test are taken from the National Assessment of Education Progress. This makes it possible for valid comparisons to be made between Minnesota students and their peers nationwide.

The Department also provides for a Local Assessment Option, sometimes called the Piggyback Option. Local districts may use the state-developed tests in any subject areas. The Department then provides a comparison of local results to state and national results, and assists districts in using the results for local curriculum planning and improvement.

Local Programs

Many Minnesota school districts have established instructional standards and testing programs. This section describes the programs in four school districts. It is not intended to be an endorsement or evaluation of the programs in these districts. Rather, it is intended to provide a brief overview of what some districts are already doing - in

the absence of a state mandate - to establish standards and test their students.

Bemidji.[5] The Bemidji public schools have been working for the past four years to develop written instructional objectives for every subject area, course, and grade; and to develop tests to measure student progress on each objective. Virtually all of the development work has been done by district administrators and teachers. As of August 1983, over 4000 test items had been written. The district is just beginning to implement the tests, and more development work remains. Eventually, test results will be used to evaluate the district's instructional program and to guide improvement efforts. District administrators claim that the program has already yielded benefits, by clarifying instructional goals and by improving coordination of the curriculum among teachers, schools, and grades.

Minneapolis.[6] The Minneapolis school board has adopted a plan for instructional improvement which includes the use of "benchmark tests" as a tool for raising student achievement and improving literacy. Tests have been developed locally to measure student performance on

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[5]Information on Bemidji's program was obtained from Phillip Bain, superintendent; and Earl Gangeness, director of instructional services; Bemidji school district.

[6]Information on the Minneapolis program is from: Gregor W. Pinney, "New Test Marks Give Indications of Learning Needs," Minneapolis Star and Tribune, September 28, 1983.

instructional objectives in the areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. The district will set standards for student performance in kindergarten and in grades two, five and seven. These grade levels will be known as "promotional gates;" each student's test scores will be used, along with other information, to determine eligibility for promotion to the next grade. Similar tests will be given to ninth grade students, who generally will not graduate unless they receiving a passing score. Students will be allowed to repeat the tests several times; if a student still doesn't receive a passing score, district staff will review other information on the student before deciding whether or not to grant a diploma. Use of the benchmark tests for promotion and graduation decisions will be phased in over several years, beginning in 1984 with kindergarten students.

North St. Paul - Maplewood - Oakdale (District 622).[7] School district 622 - located in North St. Paul, Maplewood, and Oakdale - has developed "Basic Skills Tests" to measure students' skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students are given the tests periodically, beginning in grade six for the reading and mathematics tests and grade nine for the writing test. The district had originally

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[7]Information on the District 622 program was obtained from Richard St. Germain and Karen Johnson of the district staff.

planned to require a passing score on all three tests as a prerequisite for high school graduation. But this policy was changed before it went into effect. Beginning with the class of 1984, students who pass all three tests will receive a special notation on their diplomas. Students who meet all other graduation requirements but do not pass the tests will receive diplomas without the special notation. A student may repeat the tests once a semester until he or she receives a passing score.

Roseville.[8] The Roseville area schools have developed specific goals and objectives at several levels of detail. There are broad district-wide goals for students, program goals for both the elementary and secondary levels, and specific objectives and indicators for each elementary program area and each secondary course. In addition, the district is implementing a testing program called "learning standards" in its senior high schools; the program includes tests for reading, mathematics, and writing. All tenth grade students are given a standardized reading test and a teacher-developed writing exercise. Students not scoring above the 35th percentile on the reading test (based on national norms) must take a one-semester reading course in grade 11. Students who can't meet teacher-developed

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[8]Information on the Roseville program was obtained from Rosemary Schneiderhan, assistant to the superintendent, Roseville area schools.

standards on the writing exercise must take a writing class in grade 11, and must pass the class in order to graduate. The mathematics test is given to all eleventh grade students; those who don't meet the district's standard must take and pass a one-semester math course in grade 12 to graduate.

Summary of Existing Programs

These programs are typical of Minnesota's approach to many educational issues. They emphasize state help and assistance, along with local control and flexibility. Minnesota has not adopted a mandatory statewide testing program. But the state requires districts to do their own curriculum planning and encourages them to test their students. And the state provides assistance in both of these tasks, through provision of optional tests, model goal statements, and other means.

Local districts vary greatly in their approaches to educational goals and student testing. Some districts choose to do only the minimum necessary to comply with the PER law. Other districts have developed detailed goals and conduct extensive testing to evaluate both individual students and the quality of the district's instructional program.

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APPENDIX

Characteristics of Existing State Competency Testing Programs

State	Action Taken*	Standards Set By*	Skill Areas Assessed	Uses of Test Results		
				Graduation	Grade Promotion	Other**
Alabama	1977 SBE	SEA,SBE	Math, reading, language	Yes (1984)	No	1,2
Arizona	1975,83 LEG,SBE	SBE	All subjects	Yes	Yes (1985)	
Arkansas	1979 LEG	SBE	Math,reading	No	No	2
California	1976-83 LEG	LEA	Math, reading, writing	Yes	Yes	1
Colorado	1975 LEG	LEA (At local option)	Local option	Yes (Local option)	No	
Connecticut	1978 LEG	SBE,LEA	Math,reading, language	No	No	1,3
Delaware	1978 SBE	SEA	Math,reading, writing	Yes	Yes (Local option)	
Florida	1975-83 LEG	SBE,LEA	Basic skills functional literacy	Yes	Yes	
Georgia	1976-81 SBE	SBE,SEA	Math,reading	Yes	No	
Idaho	1977 SBE	SBE	Math,reading, writing,spelling	Yes (Local option)	No	
Illinois	1978 LEG	LEA	Math,reading	No	No	2
Indiana	1978 SBE	LEA	Math,reading,spelling,composition, science,soc. stud.	No	No	1,3
Kansas	1972,81 LEG	SBE	Math,reading	No	No	4

State	Action Taken*	Standards Set By*	Skill Areas Assessed	Uses of Test Results		
				Graduation	Grade Promotion	Other**
Kentucky	1977,78 SBE,LEG	LEA	Math,reading, writing,spelling	No	No	
Louisiana	1979 LEG	SEA,SBE	Math,reading, writing	Yes (1990)	Yes (Local plan)	
Maryland	1976,77 LEG	SBE	Math,reading, writing,citizenship	Yes	Yes (Local option)	
Massachusetts	1978 SBE	LEA	Math,reading, communication	No	No	3
Missouri	1976,78 SBE	SEA	Math,reading,govt. language,economics	No	No	1
Nebraska	1975 SEA	SEA,LEA	Math,reading, writing	No	No	
Nevada	1977,79 LEG	SBE	Math,reading, writing	Yes	No	1,3
New Hampshire	1977 SEA	SEA,LEA	Math,communications	No	No	3
New Jersey	1976,79 LEG	SBE,LEA	Math,reading, writing	Yes (1989)	No	1
New Mexico	1977 SBE	SEA	Math,reading, writing	No[a]	No	
New York	1978 SBE	SBE	Math,reading, writing	Yes	No	1
North Carolina	1978 LEG	IC	Basic skills	Yes	No	
Ohio	1982 SBE	LEA	Math,reading, composition	Yes (Local option)	Yes (Local option)	
Oregon	1972-80 SBE	LEA	Math,reading, writing,speaking, listening	Yes (By local plan)	No	

[a] Passing the test is not a requirement for graduation in New Mexico, but students who pass receive a "proficiency endorsement" on their diploma.

State	Action Taken*	Standards Set By*	Skill Areas Assessed	Uses of Test Results		
				Graduation	Grade Promotion	Other**
Rhode Island	1978 SBE,SEA	SBE,SEA	Math,reading,life skills,language	No	No	
South Carolina	1978 LEG	SBE	Math,reading, writing	No	No	1
Tennessee	1977-82 SBE	SEA,LEA	Math,reading, grammar,spelling	Yes	No	1,2
Texas	1979 LEG	No min. standards	Math,reading, writing,language	No	No	1
Utah	1977 SBE	LEA	Math,reading,writing,listening,consumerism,democratic govt.,others	Yes	No	1
Vermont	1977 SBE	SBE	Math,reading, writing,speaking, listening	Yes	No	
Virginia	1972 LEG	LEG	Math,language	Yes	No	
Wisconsin	1981,82 LEG	LEA	Math,reading, language	Yes (Local option)	No	1
Wyoming	1977-80 SBE	LEA,SEA	Math,reading,writing,democratic government,free enterprise	No	No	1

* Abbreviations:
LEG - State Legislature
SBE - State Board of Education
SEA - State Education Agency
LEA - Local Education Agencies (local school boards or school districts)
IC - Independent Commission

** Codes for other uses of test results:
1 - for identification of students needing remedial instruction
2 - for diagnosis of individual students' instructional needs
3 - to guide local decisions on curriculum changes
4 - to provide information on student achievement

Notes to Appendix

1. Sources of information:
   a. Pipho, Chris. State Activity; Minimal Competency Testing. Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, November 1981.
   b. Pipho, Chris. ECS Issuegram; Student Minimum Competency Testing. Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, January 1983.
   c. Dougherty, Van. State Programs of School Improvement, 1983: A 50 - State Survey. Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, October 1983.

2. Each state's testing programs are unique, and it is difficult to know what should and shouldn't be considered a competency testing program. We have followed the classifications of the Education Commission of the States (ECS); these tables incude all programs which ECS lists under the heading of "minimum competency testing." Generally, these are all programs in which: (a) there is a state mandate to test all students in one or more grades, and (b) there is an effort to set predetermined minimum standards, either statewide or locally. The tables do not include statewide assessment programs such as Minnesota's, in which samples of students are tested every year in selected subject areas.

3. The tables summarize only a few characteristics of the testing programs. There are other important differences not shown on the tables. For more complete information, see the sources listed in note #1.

4. The test uses listed in the last three columns of the tables include only the most common uses listed in reports from Education Commission of the States. Many states also require or suggest that test results be used for public information, planning, or other purposes.