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ABSTRACT

This report provides an analysis of academic achievement in Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) states. Findings show that more students in the South are taking more challenging courses to prepare for college and careers. The percentage of high school graduates completing 4 years of English and 3 years each of social studies, mathematics, and science grew from 13 percent in the mid-1980s to 57 percent in the mid-1990s, rising above the national average. More schools and more students are participating in Advanced Placement Programs, and higher percentages of students are mastering challenging subject matter in mathematics. Subsequently, scores on college admissions test have risen in the past 10 years. States are assessing student achievement through end-of-course tests linked to content standards, and few states use a single statewide assessment for school readiness. Some of the issues surrounding assessing and improving student achievement include: agreeing on what students should know and be able to do; national norm-referenced tests; ensuring the credibility of tests; and making sure that content standards, instruction, testing, and professional development reinforce each other. Steps that SREB states are taking to improve student achievement are discussed. (RJM)

SREB

How Do SREB States Gauge Student Achievement?

Southern Regional Education Board

1998 BENCHMARKS SERIES

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

BY THE YEAR 2000—

Student achievement for elementary and secondary students will be at national levels or higher.

How Do SREB States Gauge Student Achievement?

Every SREB state can point to some measure of student achievement and show improvement compared with 10 years ago. SREB states are leaders in improving curricula, raising standards and expectations, and implementing policies aimed at better preparing students for work and college. Even so, student performance on national assessments continues to trail national averages. SREB states are making progress, but it is unlikely that leaders in any state would claim that student achievement is where it needs to be.

What do results from national studies and tests tell us?

More students are taking more challenging courses to prepare for college and careers.

The percentage of high school graduates in the South who completed four years of English and three years each of social studies, mathematics and science grew from 13 percent in the mid-1980s to 57 percent in the mid-1990s and rose above the national average. Nationally, half of the high school graduates complete these core courses.

Why are more students taking more challenging courses? Primarily because states have:

- increased the number of challenging courses required for graduation;
- raised expectations for vocational students by increasing mathematics and science requirements, defining more clearly the credits required for a vocational diploma, requiring students to select a vocational concentration and establishing higher standards for vocational courses and student performance;
- eliminated the "go-nowhere" general curriculum and required all students to complete a core of challenging academic courses in English, mathematics, science and social studies;
- encouraged more schools and students to participate in the Advanced Placement Program that offers college-level courses in high schools;

This report was prepared by Joseph D. Creech, SREB director for educational policies.

- raised college admissions standards and spelled out which high school courses and subjects students should take if they are preparing for college;
- raised standards for passing high school exit examinations and developed and used tests that are more challenging than the minimum-skills tests once used as high school competency tests.

More schools and more students are participating in the Advanced Placement Program to earn college credits in high school.

The number of students in SREB states taking Advanced Placement examinations more than doubled between 1990 and 1998. Students from nearly 60 percent of the public high schools in the region took at least one AP exam. In two SREB states (Maryland and Virginia) the percentage of AP exams on which public school students scored 3 or higher exceeded the national average (a score of 3 or higher usually is required to get college credit). The percentage of examinations with scores of 3 or higher ranges from 41 percent to 71 percent among the SREB states. The national average is 63 percent.

Why are more schools and students taking part in the Advanced Placement Program?

Primarily because states have:

- required public high schools to offer AP courses (South Carolina and Virginia);
- provided funds to pay part or all of the AP examination fees for some or all students (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas);
- provided support for training AP teachers (Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia);
- provided support for classroom materials and equipment (Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi and Oklahoma); and
- required colleges and universities to award credit for AP courses (South Carolina and West Virginia).

Higher percentages of students are mastering challenging subject matter in mathematics.

The National Assessment Governing Board has established performance standards for the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests. "Proficient" indicates that a student has mastered challenging subject matter and is well-prepared for the next level of schooling. "Basic" means that a student has partially mastered the knowledge and skills necessary for the next level of schooling. The standards set by the National Assessment Governing Board are rigorous. Some have expressed concern that the standards may be too high. Few think they are too low.

Sixty-one percent of the nation's eighth-graders met the basic standard on the 1996 mathematics assessment. In two-thirds of the SREB states (Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia)

more than 50 percent of the eighth-graders met the basic standard. That was true in only two SREB states in 1990.

Higher percentages of eighth-grade students in SREB states scored at the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics test in 1996 than in 1990. One SREB state (Maryland) was above the national average in the percentage meeting the proficient standard. Nationally, the percentage of eighth-graders at the proficient level increased to 23 percent in 1996 from 15 percent in 1990. In 1996, at least 20 percent of the eighth-graders met the proficient standard in four SREB states (Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia). In 1990, no SREB state had 20 percent of its eighth-graders meet the proficient standard for mathematics. North Carolina and Texas led the nation in gains between 1990 and 1996.

More fourth-graders in SREB states scored at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment in mathematics in 1996 than in 1992.

The percentages of fourth-graders in Maryland, North Carolina and Texas meeting the proficient standard exceeded the national average of 20 percent. In two other SREB states (Virginia and West Virginia) 19 percent of fourth-graders met the proficient standard. Only Maryland and Virginia were above the national average in 1992.

Scores on college admissions tests are higher in most SREB states than in 1990.

More high school seniors are taking college admissions tests, and they are scoring as high as or higher than 10 years ago. This is true even though a larger percentage of high school seniors who are not in the top half of the senior class are taking these tests. In Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and West Virginia, most high school seniors take the ACT assessment as part of the college admissions process. Average ACT composite scores for 1998 high school seniors are higher than in 1990 nationally and in seven of the eight SREB states in which most seniors take the ACT. Average ACT scores in Arkansas and Oklahoma increased more than the national increase between 1990 and 1998.

Most high school seniors in Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia take the SAT as part of the college admissions process. Nationally, average combined SAT scores in 1998 are the highest since 1990. That is true in seven of the eight SREB states in which the SAT is the dominant admissions test.

The national average SAT mathematics score is the highest in 27 years. Georgia, North Carolina and Texas also have their highest average SAT mathematics scores in nearly 30 years; average combined SAT scores in those states increased more than the national increase between 1990 and 1998.

Why are average scores on college admissions tests better?

Raising average scores on college admissions tests is not a short-term project. Scores on college admissions tests improve because:

- More students take more of the courses they should take if they are preparing for college.
- Colleges and universities work more closely with high schools to improve college preparatory programs and courses.
- Programs are developed to identify students in grades seven through 10 who need additional help and courses in preparation for college and to provide those students with extra help. For example, in Florida, 10th-graders can take college-entry placement tests to find out the subjects in which they need additional work; Georgia's Postsecondary Readiness Enrichment Program provides tutoring, improves students' readiness for college and teaches students in middle and high schools to use technology; and Oklahoma's Educational Planning and Assessment System evaluates eighth- and 10th-graders to determine whether they are on track to be prepared for college and careers.
- States encourage students to take more rigorous courses and meet higher performance standards by providing incentives, such as special recognition diplomas. States also offer financial incentives for higher student performance. For example, in Georgia the HOPE Scholarships give free tuition to students who earn at least a "B" average.

How are states assessing student achievement?

There are almost as many approaches to statewide assessment as there are states. Different tests of student achievement are given to students at different grade levels in different states. For example, in the 10 SREB states in which a national norm-referenced test was part of the statewide assessment program, five different norm-referenced tests were used. No more than three states used any one of the five tests. Also, some states test all students in grades three through eight, while others test only fourth-graders and eighth-graders. A review of statewide assessment programs (see Table 5) in SREB states shows:

- Half of the SREB states use or are implementing end-of-course tests linked to content standards for core academic subjects in grades nine through 12 (Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia).
- Twelve SREB states (Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia) use or are developing end-of-grade tests linked directly to the state's content standards for grades three through eight.
- National norm-referenced tests were a part of statewide assessment programs in 10 SREB states in 1997-98. Alabama, Arkansas and Virginia used the Stanford Achievement Test; Georgia, Mississippi and Oklahoma used the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; Tennessee and West Virginia, the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills;

Table 1

Student Performance on National Tests, SREB States

Most recent results on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), ACT, SAT and Advanced Placement

	NAEP Mathematics, Fourth Grade, 1996		NAEP Mathematics, Eighth Grade, 1996		NAEP Science, Eighth Grade, 1996		SAT 1998 *	ACT 1998 **	AP 1998 ***
	Percentage at or above basic level	Percentage at or above proficient level	Percentage at or above basic level	Percentage at or above proficient level	Percentage at or above basic level	Percentage at or above proficient level	Average score	Average score	
Nation	62	20	61	23	60	27	1017	21.0	63%
Alabama	48	11	45	12	47	18		20.1	54%
Arkansas	54	13	52	13	55	22		20.4	52%
Delaware	54	16	55	19	51	21	994		59%
Florida	55	15	54	17	51	21	1001		53%
Georgia	53	13	51	16	49	21	968		56%
Kentucky	60	16	56	16	58	23		20.2	46%
Louisiana	44	8	38	7	40	13		19.5	61%
Maryland	59	22	57	24	55	25	1014		71%
Mississippi	42	8	36	7	39	12		18.7	41%
North Carolina	64	21	56	20	56	24	982		58%
Oklahoma	—	—	—	—	—	—		20.5	58%
South Carolina	48	12	48	14	45	17	951		54%
Tennessee	58	17	53	15	53	22		19.8	61%
Texas	69	25	59	21	55	23	995		56%
Virginia	62	19	58	21	59	27	1006		65%
West Virginia	63	19	54	14	56	21		20.1	56%

At or above national averages

— Did not participate in NAEP statewide assessments

* Combined SAT verbal and math average scores in those states where the SAT is the college admissions test taken by most high school seniors

** Average composite ACT score in those states where the ACT is the college admissions test taken by most high school seniors

*** Percentage of Advanced Placement examinations on which public school students scored at least a 3, the score recommended for college credit

Table 2

Trends in Student Achievement, Fourth Grade: National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading (1992 and 1994) and Mathematics (1992 and 1996)

	Reading				Mathematics			
	Percentage at or above basic level		Percentage at or above proficient level		Percentage at or above basic level		Percentage at or above proficient level	
	1992	1994	1992	1994	1992	1996	1992	1996
Nation	60	59	27	28	57	62	17	20
Alabama	51	52	20	23	43	48	10	11
Arkansas	56	54	23	24	47	54	10	13
Delaware	57	52	24	23	55	54	17	16
Florida	53	50	21	23	52	55	13	15
Georgia	57	52	25	26	53	53	15	13
Kentucky	58	56	23	26	51	60	13	16
Louisiana	46	40	15	15	39	44	8	8
Maryland	57	55	24	26	55	59	18	22
Mississippi	41	45	14	18	36	42	6	8
North Carolina	56	59	25	30	50	64	13	21
Oklahoma	64	—	25	—	62	—	14	—
South Carolina	53	48	22	20	48	48	13	12
Tennessee	57	58	23	27	47	58	10	17
Texas	57	58	24	26	56	69	15	25
Virginia	67	57	31	26	59	62	19	19
West Virginia	61	58	25	26	52	63	12	19

SREB states where the percentage of students at this level increased as much as or more than the national increase or improved despite a national decrease

— Did not participate in statewide assessments

Table 3
Trends in Student Achievement, Eighth Grade: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Assessments

	Mathematics					
	Percent at or above basic			Percent at or above proficient		
	1990	1992	1996	1990	1992	1996
Nation	51	56	61	15	20	23
SREB States	45	48	51	12	14	16
Alabama	40	39	45	9	10	12
Arkansas	44	44	52	9	10	13
Delaware	48	52	55	14	15	19
Florida	43	49	54	12	15	17
Georgia	47	48	51	14	13	16
Kentucky	43	51	56	10	14	16
Louisiana	32	37	38	5	7	7
Maryland	50	54	57	17	20	24
Mississippi	—	33	36	—	6	7
North Carolina	38	47	56	9	12	20
Oklahoma	60	65	—	13	21	—
South Carolina	—	48	48	—	15	14
Tennessee	—	47	53	—	12	15
Texas	45	53	59	13	18	21
Virginia	52	57	58	17	19	21
West Virginia	42	47	54	9	10	14

SREB states where the percentage of students at this level increased as much as or more than the national increase between 1990 and 1996

— Did not participate in statewide assessments

Table 4
Trends in Student Performance on National Tests
SREB States

	Average SAT *		Average ACT **		Advanced Placement ***	
	1990	1998	1990	1998	1990	1998
Nation	1001	1017	20.6	21.0	65%	63%
Alabama			19.8	20.1	50%	54%
Arkansas			19.9	20.4	65%	52%
Delaware	1006	994			NA	59%
Florida	988	1001			54%	53%
Georgia	951	968			62%	56%
Kentucky			20.0	20.2	42%	46%
Louisiana			19.4	19.5	48%	61%
Maryland	1008	1014			70%	71%
Mississippi			18.6	18.7	41%	41%
North Carolina	948	982			63%	58%
Oklahoma			20.1	20.5	62%	58%
South Carolina	942	951			55%	54%
Tennessee			20.1	19.8	59%	61%
Texas	979	995			67%	56%
Virginia	997	1006			69%	65%
West Virginia			19.8	20.1	50%	56%

SREB states where average scores or the percentage of students at this level increased as much as or more than the national increase or improved despite a national decrease

NA – Data not available

* Combined SAT verbal and math average scores in those states where the SAT is the college admissions test taken by most high school seniors

** Average composite ACT score in those states where the ACT is the college admissions test taken by most high school seniors

*** Percentage of Advanced Placement examinations on which public school students scored at least a 3, the score recommended for college credit

Louisiana, the California Achievement Test; and South Carolina, the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

- Few states are using a single statewide assessment for school readiness or for students in the early grades. Georgia and South Carolina have a common assessment of school readiness for children in kindergarten and first grade. Texas has a statewide classroom-based reading assessment that is used to identify and assist students with reading problems. Louisiana also is implementing a statewide assessment of reading in the early grades.
- In most statewide assessment programs, testing begins at grade three or four. All states test students (either a national norm-referenced or a state-developed test) in grades four and eight. Statewide assessment programs in Alabama, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas include end-of-grade testing for students in grades three through eight each year.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress provides the most comparable state-by-state information on student achievement in mathematics, science, reading and writing. But the National Assessment provides state-by-state information only for students in grades four and eight and is not given every year in the same subjects (i.e., mathematics and science assessments were given in 1996 and reading and writing were assessed in 1998).

What we know about assessing and improving student achievement

- **Agreeing on what students should know and be able to do is the first step.**

If there is no agreement within a state on the skills and knowledge students should have, the test that is used may be the biggest factor in determining what is taught and learned. That situation is not ideal.

States have taken different approaches in developing standards for what students should know in English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. They also differ in how and when they assess whether students have mastered the knowledge and skills outlined in their standards. Because of these differences, each state is looking for tests that are tailored to its content standards.

Most states are contracting with testing companies to develop tests for them. For example, Virginia contracted with Harcourt-Brace Educational Measurement to develop tests for the Virginia Standards of Learning; CTB-McGraw Hill helped Florida develop the new Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests that are tied to the Sunshine State Standards; and Riverside Publishing is working with Georgia on its new assessment program.

States without clearly defined content standards will be at a disadvantage in developing their tests or in choosing an existing test. States must decide whether the tests measure what is important for students to know and be able to do.

- **Any measure of student achievement has strengths and weaknesses.** A thermometer is a good instrument to measure body temperature, but not blood pressure. It is unlikely that a single test can provide all the comparative and diagnostic information needed to improve student achievement.

- National norm-referenced tests usually measure content and skills commonly taught in schools throughout the nation. They are not designed to match the content standards of any particular state or district. Students may not be taught the same knowledge and skills at each grade level in every state. Norm-referenced tests show how students compare with each other on broad areas of knowledge.
- Tests linked to a specific state's curriculum and performance standards (state curriculum-based or criterion-referenced tests) show whether students are mastering the knowledge and skills expected. State-developed tests do not show how the level of mastery compares with that of students across the nation.
- Some national testing companies say their tests can provide results that show whether students are meeting levels of performance expected by the state and can compare students with others nationwide. That is possible if what is measured by the national test matches a state's content standards. If there is not a direct match, states must determine which questions are needed to make the "national" test into a "state" test. That usually means that some "national" questions will be eliminated to make room for the "state" questions or that the test will be longer. Achieving a balance between the number of test items that are "national" and "state" can be difficult. In order to get credible results, there must be enough of both "national" and "state" items.

- Tests should measure problem-solving and thinking and reasoning skills, not just knowledge of facts. Most national and state tests now include a variety of items that require students to demonstrate their verbal and mathematical reasoning and thinking skills. In addition to multiple-choice items (in which students select a correct answer from several options), more tests now require students to supply an answer or to write a sentence or short paragraph.
- The testing program must be credible. To be credible, tests must:
  - Measure what they are supposed to measure (a thermometer measures temperature, not blood pressure). Samples of the types of questions on the tests, sample versions of the tests or "retired" versions can help give them credibility among teachers, students and parents. For example, North Carolina provides sample tests to familiarize students with end-of-grade and end-of-course exams. The College Board and ACT provide sample tests for students and teachers to become familiar with the types of questions and problems on their college admissions tests.
  - Generate consistent results. Because tests can provide only estimates of what students know and can do, no test is 100 percent reliable. To be reliable, tests must have enough items to sample what students know and to report consistent scores. That means a student's score will remain about the same if he or she is given the test on different days. Also, the tests must be able to generate results that are comparable from year to year. That is espe-

cially important if one wants to compare the performance of eighth-graders in 1998 with that of eighth-graders in 1996.

The types of questions on a test also can affect its reliability. Tests that contain only multiple-choice questions generally are highly reliable because they can ask more questions in a specified time period and are administered consistently. Tests are less reliable when they are not administered under the same conditions each time (from school to school or student to student) and scoring is more subjective. How reliable a test needs to be is related to how the results will be used. For example, students may be asked to write an essay as part of a statewide assessment. Because grading of essays is more subjective than grading multiple-choice or sentence-completion tests, the results may not be reliable enough to use in an accountability system that rewards schools or sanctions low-performing schools. The results may be reliable enough for students and teachers to use in improving instruction and writing skills.

- Be given under the same conditions and scored in the same way. The physical conditions of different locations where the tests are given are similar, the same directions are given in each location, specific time limits are set, the same questions are asked and each student's performance can be compared with that of other students taking the test. These are characteristics of "standardized" tests.
- Be fair. States and districts almost certainly will be sued if tests put members of different groups at an unfair disadvantage. State and national tests must be reviewed regularly to determine whether test questions assume background knowledge that all students may not have or content knowledge and skills not covered in the curriculum.

■ **Content standards, instruction, testing and professional development need to reinforce each other.** Whatever test is used should measure what students are expected to learn and what teachers are expected to teach. Once a valid, reliable test is chosen or developed, states must stay the course for many years — long enough to have the testing, the instruction and the professional development for teachers reinforcing each other. Then real improvements can be sustained.

Steps SREB states are taking to improve student achievement

■ **More states are using end-of-course or end-of-grade tests.** These tests show whether students have mastered the content and skills specified in state curricula. A frequently heard comment in states that have end-of-course and end-of-grade tests is that there is a more consistent focus on content across all districts. Teachers teach and students learn the concepts spelled out in the content standards, and the tests measure what has been taught.

- **More states are establishing achievement standards for students.** Test results compare a student's performance with the achievement standards rather than with scores of other students. It may be important to know that the typical fourth-grader in a state scores better than 50 percent of fourth-graders in the nation in reading. But if most fourth-graders in the nation are not reading at a high level, students could be above the national average but not reading well enough.

Setting achievement standards can be controversial and political because they involve judgments. Many SREB states have established standards by defining what it means to "pass" or be "proficient." These standards sometimes may not match what the public, employers and colleges hope for, and they may not be competitive with standards in other states or with international standards. Comparing results with external benchmarks such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress or with tests and results in other states can help states set the standards high enough.

The following are several examples of issues that may be faced when setting standards and the questions that arise when low percentages of students meet the standards.

Arkansas' High School Proficiency Exam is based on the state's content standards for literacy (reading and writing) and mathematics. In 1996-97 fewer than 50 percent of the students taking the test met the standard for literacy and only 20 percent met the mathematics standard. Because of the low "pass" rates, the Arkansas Department of Education reviewed the test, how it is given, its alignment with the curriculum, the performance levels and how results on the test compared with results on the ACT. As a result of these reviews, the Arkansas Department of Education is converting the literacy section of the High School Proficiency Exam into end-of-level reading and writing tests for high school seniors. Because the high school mathematics curriculum consists of specific courses, the mathematics section will be discontinued, and end-of-course tests in algebra and geometry will be developed. These steps are expected to sharpen the alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

After its reviews of the mathematics test and the performance standards, the department concluded that the focus of the test was not consistent with the way teachers were teaching mathematics. The department is taking steps to make sure that all districts teach the standards that define what students should know in mathematics.

In 1996, about 60 percent of North Carolina's eighth-graders met that state's proficient standard based on the eighth-grade mathematics test. Twenty-three percent were "proficient" based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics test. These differences raised questions about the standards: Is the national standard too high? Is the North Carolina standard too low? North Carolina and the National Assessment Governing Board conducted a study to determine why the results were so different. They found that the disparity most likely was because of differences in how North Carolina and the National Assessment Governing Board defined "proficient." North Carolina set its standard based on what students are learning, while the National Assessment standard is based on judgments of what students should learn.

Table 5
Statewide Assessment Programs in SREB States, 1997-98

	Grade	Name of Assessment
Alabama	9	Alabama Basic Competency Tests (reading, mathematics, language)
	5, 7	Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing
	11, 12	High School Basic Skills Exit Exam (reading, mathematics, language)
	3-11	Stanford Achievement Test (reading, mathematics, language, science, social studies)
		End-of-course test in Algebra I and geometry. (Will be incorporated into new high school exit examinations in 1998-99.)
Arkansas	5, 7, 10	Stanford Achievement Test (reading, mathematics, language, science, social studies)
	4, 8	Benchmarks examinations (criterion-referenced tests) — grade 4 first given in 1998; grade 8 to be given in 1999
	9, 10	End-of-level examinations (criterion-referenced tests) in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies to be developed
	11, 12	High School Proficiency Examination (reading, writing, mathematics). Will be changed to end-of-course/level examinations.
Delaware	3, 5, 8, 10	State tests in English/language arts and mathematics (spring 1998)
	4, 6, 8, 11	State tests in science and social studies (beginning in spring 1999 for grades 8 and 11 and in fall 1999 for grades 4 and 6)
Florida	4, 8, 10	Writing assessment program (Florida Writes)
	4, 8, 10	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in reading. Initial administration in 1997-98 school year.
	5, 8, 10	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in mathematics. Initial administration in 1997-98 school year.
	10	Grade Ten Assessment Test (GTAT) (math, reading comprehension)
	11	High School Competency Test (HSCT) (math, reading, writing)
Georgia	4, 6, 8	Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (math, reading, science, social studies, health education)
	11, 12	High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) (English/language arts, math, science, social studies, writing)
	K	Kindergarten Assessment Program (GKAP) (communication, logical/math, personal/physical, social)
	3, 5, 8	Norm-referenced testing — Iowa Test of Basic Skills
	3, 5, 8	Writing assessment
Kentucky	4, 8, 11	Assessments in math, reading, science, social studies, writing
	4, 8, 11	Performance events (arts & humanities, career/vocational education, math, science, social studies)
	4, 8, 12	Portfolio assessments (math, writing)
		In 1998-99 Kentucky will begin implementing the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, which is to provide scores for school and student accountability.
Louisiana	4, 6	Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program (California Achievement Tests) (reading, language, mathematics)
	3, 5, 7	Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) (language arts, mathematics)
	5, 7	Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) (written composition)
	12	Louisiana Graduation Exit Examination (language arts, mathematics, written composition, science, social studies)
Maryland	9, 11	Maryland Functional Tests (reading, mathematics, writing, citizenship). These will be replaced by end-of-course tests beginning with students entering 9th grade in fall 2000.
	9-12	End-of-course tests in core academic subjects (English, mathematics, science, social studies) beginning in 2000
	3, 5, 8	Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science, social studies)

Table 5
Statewide Assessment Programs in SREB States, 1997-98 (cont'd)

	Grade	Name of Assessment
Mississippi	11	Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) (mathematics, reading, written communication)
	4-9	Norm-referenced testing — Iowa Test of Basic Skills (reading, language, mathematics)
North Carolina	8-12	End-of-course tests (All schools must give the tests in English I and II, Algebra I, geometry, biology and civics.)
	3-8	End-of-grade tests (math, reading/English, social studies)
	10	High School Comprehensive Test (reading, mathematics). First administered in spring 1998.
	4, 6, 8	Writing assessments
Oklahoma	3, 7	Iowa Test of Basic Skills (reading, language, mathematics, social studies, science)
	5, 8, 11	Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (mathematics, science, reading, writing)
South Carolina	1	Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (given to children entering 1st grade to assess school readiness)
	3, 6, 8, 10	Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) (reading, mathematics, writing, science). Legislation in 1998 requires assessments based on curriculum standards in mathematics, English/language arts, science and social studies in grades 3-8.
	10	Exit examination (BSAP). 1998 legislation requires end-of-course examinations in core subject areas.
	4, 5, 7, 9, 11	Norm-referenced testing — Metropolitan Achievement Test, 7th Edition (MAT7) (reading, mathematics, language). Legislation passed in 1998 requires norm-referenced test administered to a random sample in at least three grades between grades 3 and 11 as determined by an oversight group.
Tennessee	3-8	Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS/4) (mathematics, reading, language, science, social studies, study skills, spelling). Tennessee will use TerraNova test items in 1998-99.
	3-8	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test (CRT) (language arts, mathematics)
	4, 8, 11	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment
	9-12	End-of-course tests in Algebra I, Algebra II, English I, English II, physical science, biology, U.S. history and writing are being implemented.
	9	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Competency Test
Texas	K-3	Statewide reading assessment that is classroom-based and used to diagnose reading problems and provide appropriate help to students.
	3-7	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests (reading, mathematics, writing)
	8	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests (reading, mathematics, writing, science, social studies)
	10	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exit-level tests (reading, mathematics)
	9-12	End-of-course tests (Algebra I, English II, biology, U.S. history)
	3-4	Spanish TAAS (mathematics, reading)
Virginia	6-12	Literacy Passport Testing Program (will be discontinued)
	3, 5, 8	Standards of Learning assessments (mathematics, English, science, social studies)
	9-12	End-of-course tests (English, mathematics, history/social studies, science)
	3, 5, 8	Stanford 9 Achievement Tests (language, reading, mathematics, science, social studies)
West Virginia	3, 6, 9, 11	Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS/4) (reading, language, mathematics)

Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Tests in reading and mathematics are linked directly to Florida's new curriculum standards that establish higher expectations of students. Achievement levels that students must meet will be set during 1998-99. In the initial administration of the tests in 1998, the typical student mastered about 50 percent of the content measured by the tests.

Questions state leaders need to ask

As states develop or revise statewide assessments and establish expectations and achievement standards for students, state leaders need to ask:

- What do we want the statewide assessment program to do? Can the results be used to hold schools accountable for student learning? Will the results be reliable enough to make judgments about individual students (i.e., to determine whether a student should pass or fail a subject or grade)?
- Does the assessment measure what students are expected to know and do as outlined in the state's content standards? Does the assessment measure what should be taught or what is taught? Are teachers teaching what is outlined in the content standards?
- Are the achievement standards set high enough to be challenging? How do the results compare with results on other assessments being conducted in the state (i.e., National Assessment of Educational Progress)?
- Are the students motivated to do their best on the tests? What incentives are there for individual students to give their best effort?
- Are there safeguards to prevent irregularities in the administration of the tests?
- Will the assessment program allow the state to measure progress over time?

States have taken different approaches to reaching consensus on what students should know and be able to do, selecting or developing tests to measure the content and skills, and setting expectations for student achievement.

Reality hits when students' scores on the tests are released and states find that most students do not meet the achievement standards that education, civic and business leaders believe to be reasonable. That is when state leaders must stand firm. In the words of one commissioner of education:

"We were prepared for the reality that some students would not clear the bar on the first try. That doesn't mean we lower the bar."

Improving students' readiness for the next level of schooling, for colleges and universities, and for the workplace calls for establishing challenging content standards and high expectations of student achievement; making those standards and expectations clear to teachers, students, parents and state leaders; and choosing assessments that are technically sound and credible.

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