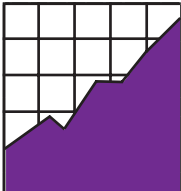


Alternative Routes to the Standard Diploma



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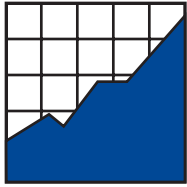
Alternative Routes to the Standard Diploma

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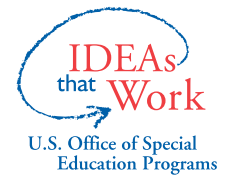
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Executive Summary

Mandatory exit exams are in place, or will soon be, in 27 states. Students must pass them as one condition for receiving a standard diploma. Because the standard diploma is considered a property right, states must carefully consider the opportunities that students have to pass graduation exams. Federal legislation has resulted in increased emphasis on the participation of all students in statewide assessments, including those with disabilities. Attention also is being paid to the use of accommodations during exit exams, and the extent to which these exams are designed to be accessible to the greatest possible number of students. There have been several court cases in which states were challenged about the extent to which they allowed appropriate accommodations.

While universally designed and accessible tests and appropriate accommodations are important to ensure that exit exams give students the opportunities needed to earn a standard diploma, they alone may not be adequate. As a result, a number of states provide alternative routes that students can take to earn a standard diploma. The purpose of this study was to investigate the alternative routes used by states for *all students* (including students with disabilities) and those that are allowed only for *students with disabilities*. In a previous National Center on Educational Outcomes survey, state directors of special education (or a designee) in 16 states indicated that an alternative route of some type was available. Our study involved obtaining information on alternative routes from these state Web sites, and then verifying that information (and adding to it when verifiable information was received).

Of the 16 states that we studied, 10 had an alternative route for all students (including students with disabilities) as well as alternative routes just for students with disabilities. Three of the remaining six states had alternative routes for all students only, and three had alternative routes just for students with disabilities. We examined the specific nature of the alternative routes, including the eligibility criteria, who initiates the alternative route request, who makes decisions, the process itself, and the comparability of the alternative route to the standard route and found significant variation. Perhaps of most interest was our analysis of the comparability of the alternative routes and the standard routes to the diploma. Although we used only broad criteria for our analysis, it is nevertheless noteworthy that 71% of the alternative routes for *all students* were judged comparable to the standard routes, whereas only 35% of the alternative routes for *students with disabilities* were judged to be comparable. This tendency of many states to identify non-comparable routes for students with disabilities leads to questions about the assumptions and beliefs that underlie the alternative routes.

Based on our analysis of states' approaches and an amalgamation of varied results from many other studies, we propose a basic assumption that should underlie the development of any alternative route—regardless of the target of the alternative route: Because the standard diploma is an important property right, the alternative route to this property right should uphold the

same principles as the standard route to the diploma. This assumption leads us to make several recommendations:

1. States with an alternative route to their standard diploma must provide clear, easy-to-find information about the alternative route.
2. The alternative route must be based on the same beliefs and premises as the standard route to the diploma.
3. The same route or routes should be available to all students.
4. The alternative route should truly be an alternative to the graduation exam, not just another test.
5. The alternative route should reflect a reasoned and reasonable process.
6. Procedures should be implemented to evaluate the technical adequacy of the alternative route and to track its consequences.

There is much that states have to do to open up opportunities for students with disabilities to demonstrate what they know and can do through ways other than those typically used in large-scale assessments. It is a worthwhile endeavor if we want the diploma to mean something for all students who receive it.

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Overview

In this era of significant accountability for schools and districts, many states also focus on high stakes accountability for students (Heubert, 2002; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). The major federal legislation that supports education in the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), focuses on system improvement and holding systems responsible for the improved achievement of students. As states face the implications and consequences of system accountability, they have questioned whether they can achieve its goals without imposing student accountability as well—as a way to increase the student motivation necessary for state test performance to reflect what students actually know (O’Neil, Sugrue, Abedi, Baker, & Golan, 1997). In most instances, this student accountability involves adding high school graduation exams to more traditional course requirements.

Exit Exams

More than half of the states have, or will soon have, mandatory exit exams that must be taken and passed as a condition for receiving a standard diploma (Center on Education Policy, 2002, 2003; Johnson & Thurlow, 2003). Tests generally are considered “high stakes” when they are used in making decisions about which students will be promoted or retained in grade, and which will receive high school diplomas (Heubert, 2002; Thurlow & Johnson, 2000).

Exit exams are not a new idea. Several states adopted policies and implemented minimum competency tests in the 1970s and 1980s. The aim was to ensure that students leaving high schools had some minimal set of skills that meant they were ready for the workplace, college, or other post-secondary training. Along with increased global competition in the 1990s came an emphasis on higher levels of student performance. No longer were people interested in the minimal skills reflected in minimum competency tests and the resulting high school diplomas. Increasingly there was evidence that students were leaving schools without adequate skills even though they had received high schools diplomas; this was found to be the case whether the students were in states with minimum competency tests or in states that only had coursework requirements. Evidence of the lack of adequate skills has included complaints from employers about the basic academic skills of high school graduates (Public Agenda, 2002) and the high rate at which high school graduates take remedial courses when they enter college (NCES, 2001).

Initial high failure rates on exit exams in states like Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia triggered attacks on the states’ academic standards and assessments, and produced calls for the tests to be eliminated or deferred. In most cases, the states stayed with the standards that they had set; in some, the passing scores were lowered (Schwartz & Gandal, 2000). Even when states stayed with their original standards, they almost always found that results on graduation exams

improved in subsequent years. In Massachusetts, 49% of tenth graders failed either or both of the math and English portions of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam in 2000, compared to 55% who failed at least one of those sections in 1999 (Gehring, 2000). Following an initial jump in the percentage reaching competency in Massachusetts when the tests first counted, the percentage of students passing the graduation tests on the first attempt has shown a steady increase (Wiener, 2004).

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has tracked states' practices in including students with disabilities in large scale assessment and accountability systems for many years. On occasion, attention has been devoted to those assessments that have high stakes for individual students (Guy, Shin, Lee, & Thurlow, 1999; Langenfeld, Thurlow, & Scott, 1996; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995). Recently NCEO joined forces with the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) to study graduation requirements for students with disabilities (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003). Each time a report is completed, it is again obvious that states' graduation requirements and the array of exit documents are varied and complex.

Legal Issues

When states grapple with high failure rates or concerns about the performance of certain subgroups of students, legal considerations often emerge. Attention is directed to how students obtain high school diplomas because the high school diploma is considered a property right. A U.S. Supreme Court case, *Debra P. v. Turlington* (1981), confirmed that a high school diploma is a constitutionally protected property interest, and that the due process provisions of the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments of the U.S. Constitution are applicable to graduation tests. These indicate that students must be given adequate notice of the exams (which, according to *Debra P.*, is *four years*), and they must have been taught the information included on the tests.

Several subsequent decisions confirmed the *Debra P.* ruling (for example, *Brookhart v. Illinois*, 1983). Recent court cases that have addressed exit exams have taken a slightly different twist, focusing in part on the inappropriateness of the tests because of the nature of their accommodation policies as well as the number and type of accommodations that were allowed during the test. Four of these cases are relevant here because of their implications for understanding alternative routes that states have made available for students with and without disabilities to earn a standard diploma.

Rene v. Reed, a 2001 Indiana case, raised two issues about graduation exams: (1) the length of the time period that students knew about the testing requirement—an issue of adequate notice (raised especially for students with disabilities, reflecting a concern that they were unlikely to have had access to the curriculum before the requirement was announced); and (2) the number

and type of accommodations allowed for students with disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This case was decided in favor of the state, with the judge making the decision on the basis that *three years* is adequate notice of an upcoming graduation exam, regardless of the student's prior school experiences. No decision was made on the basis of the accommodation argument.

Advocates for Special Kids (ASK) v. Oregon (1999) argued that students with disabilities did not have an equal and fair chance to pass the state test to earn a Certificate of Initial Mastery because the state's list of allowable accommodations was too narrow and the research base for the accommodation policies was non-existent. Oregon settled out of court in 2001 agreeing, among other things, to establish an Accommodations Panel that would review research and other evidence each year to determine whether an accommodation produces invalid scores. Oregon also agreed to develop an alternative route for students to earn the Certificate of Initial Mastery when they were unable to demonstrate that they had met the standard through a paper and pencil format.

In *Juleus Chapman et al. v. California Department of Education* (2001), one concern was that the state had not made sure that students with disabilities had reasonable accommodations during the test. The judge imposed an immediate solution, which was to allow all students with disabilities to receive any accommodations they needed to participate in the exit exam. California now has an advisory panel considering alternatives to the high school exit exam for students with disabilities, with recommendations to be made in 2005.

Alaska also was challenged with a court case by Advocates for Special Kids. Settling out of court in 2004, the state began working on its accommodation policies. During 2004, high school seniors with disabilities were not required to pass the state's high school exam to graduate (Associated Press, 2004). Provisions for accommodations and other alternatives for subsequent classes are in development.

Alternative Routes

As is evident in the legal cases, there continues to be considerable activity around the high school diploma. Much of this activity lately addresses the concern of what must be done to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the opportunity to earn a diploma and the benefits associated with it. Given the value of the standard diploma, it is important to determine whether those states that have graduation exams provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. And when there is an alternative, it is important to ask whether it requires activities other than completing a paper and pencil test.

The need for an alternative route to a standard diploma comes up most often when talking about

students with disabilities. Some disabilities may make it difficult for students to respond via paper and pencil; even if they can respond to this format, it may be difficult to accurately reflect their knowledge and skills. Allowable accommodations may not meet their disability needs. For these students, an alternative route may be needed for them to show their skills. It is likely that similar arguments can be made for students without disabilities—unusual circumstances may arise or other characteristics may create a need to be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills in ways other than with a paper and pencil test.

A survey of special education directors conducted by NCEO (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003) indicated that 24 states had a high stakes graduation assessment, and 3 states were working on one. Seven states reported that passing the assessment was the only way to earn a standard diploma. Directors from the other states gave responses indicating that other routes were available to students.

Directors from eight states reported that students with disabilities could earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation examination. Two states reported that they used a process of juried or performance assessments as an alternative route for students to show knowledge. Three states indicated that they had an appeals process that included students with disabilities, and one state responded that it was developing an appeals process *only* for students with disabilities. Finally, there were two states that simply indicated they had “other” ways for students to earn a standard diploma.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore states’ alternative routes after first documenting which states actually do and do not have alternative routes to the standard diploma. Several questions remained unanswered despite the information gathered from the 2003 NCEO survey of special education directors. For example, what exactly are the alternative routes to a standard diploma? Are they indeed waivers from the test, or other ways to determine whether students possess the skills and knowledge equivalent to those measured on the exit exams? Are these options available for all students? Are there some alternatives for students with disabilities and other routes for students without disabilities? What are the specific criteria involved in order for students to access these alternative routes?

It was very important in this study not to confuse the alternative route to the standard diploma that could be used when a state had a graduation exam with the “alternate assessments” that states had developed to meet requirements of the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Alternate assessments were first defined in IDEA 97 as assessments for students unable to participate in the general assessment. Alternate assessments are included in Title I legislation and in NCLB accountability requirements as a specific state

option for system stakes in school, district, and state accountability. It would be easy for an uninformed researcher to confuse an alternative route assessment and an alternate assessment simply because of the similarity of the terms “alternate” and “alternative.” We made it a priority not to confuse these two in our analysis of states’ alternative routes to the standard diploma.

Method

Starting from the NCEO survey data (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003) to identify states that potentially had alternative routes for students to obtain a standard high school diploma, we conducted online searches of state Web sites from October to December 2003. We searched for information about graduation examinations, details about alternative routes for obtaining a standard diploma, and specific criteria required to participate in any alternative route that we identified. We looked in sections of the states’ Web sites related to the topic, such as “Assessment,” “Accountability,” and “Graduation Requirements.” For states that had searchable Web sites we used several of the following key words and phrases: appeals, exit exams, graduation examination, graduation requirements, high stakes tests, high school testing, standard diploma, and waiver.

Once the information was collected from state Web sites, it was summarized in tables and brief descriptive paragraphs. This summary information was mailed in early January 2004 to state assessment directors for verification. In several cases, the state directors delegated the task of verifying the state profiles to other knowledgeable specialists, including education consultants and other state assessment personnel. The states were asked to verify the accuracy of our information. We then followed up by contacting the states by e-mail, and in some cases, by fax. All but four of the states we contacted for verification responded to our request. Changes were made following verification and this verified information is used in this report. The state profiles, which are the basis for tables on alternative routes, are included in Appendix A.

In the process of compiling the report, we analyzed the comparability of each alternative route to the standard route for obtaining a diploma. In early October 2004, we sent our comparability analysis for each state to the state contacts to allow them to review our results and provide other information to us if they disagreed. All but two states responded to this request for verification.

Graduation Exams: The Context for Alternative Routes to Standard Diplomas

Only those states that have graduation exams, or those with other exams that are considered high stakes for students, are likely to have alternative routes for demonstrating mastery of the

knowledge and skills measured by those exams. Based on our review of the information in the NCEO report, *2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On* (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003), as well as information in the Johnson and Thurlow (2003) report on graduation requirements, *A National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options for Youth with Disabilities*, we identified 27 states that had active or soon to be active graduation exams.

The 27 states that we identified are listed in Table 1, along with the year of the first graduating class that is to be held to passing the exam and whether the exit exam is being used by the state to meet NCLB criteria (for example, being used as the high school exam). This table necessarily reflects a snapshot in time.

Table 1. State Exit Exams and No Child Left Behind

State	First Graduating Class ^a	Exit Exam Used to Meet NCLB Criteria	Exit Exam Not Used to Meet NCLB Criteria
Alabama	1985	✓	
Alaska	2004	✓	
Arizona	2006	✓	
California	2006	✓	
Florida	2003	✓	
Georgia	1994	✓	
Hawaii ^b	2008		
Idaho	2005	✓	
Indiana	2000	✓	
Louisiana	2003	✓	
Maryland	2008		✓
Massachusetts	2003	✓	
Minnesota	2000		✓
Mississippi	2003	✓	
Nevada	2003	✓	
New Jersey	2003	✓	
New Mexico	1990		✓
New York	2003	✓	
North Carolina	1982		✓
Ohio	2007	✓	
Oregon ^c	2001		✓
South Carolina ^d	1990	✓	
Tennessee	2005	✓	
Texas	2005		✓
Utah	2007		✓

Table 1. State Exit Exams and No Child Left Behind (continued)

State	First Graduating Class^a	Exit Exam Used to Meet NCLB Criteria	Exit Exam Not Used to Meet NCLB Criteria
Virginia	2004	✓	
Washington ^e	2008	✓	
Totals		19	7

^a Information is from Center on Education Policy (2003), with updating as appropriate.

^b Hawaii does not have clear information about whether its exit exam will be used to meet criteria of NCLB.

^c Oregon exam is actually for a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM). Students receive diplomas regardless of whether they pass the test to earn the CIM.

^d South Carolina will begin phasing in a new exit exam instead of the current Basic Skills Assessment Program; the new exam is already being used for NCLB accountability, but will not count as a graduation requirement for high school until 2006.

^e Washington was not identified in the Johnson and Thurlow (2003) study as a state planning to have an exit exam. Since the time of that study, it has added an exit exam requirement for a diploma.

We noted as we gathered information from the two sources and checked each state’s information against state Web sites that several states had changed the year in which their exams began to “count” for high stakes. Some states had phased in a new test while phasing out an earlier version of a graduation exam. For example, Texas moved from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Students who were enrolled in grade 9 or higher on January 1, 2001, were required to pass the TAAS, regardless of when they graduate. Students who were enrolled in grade 8 or lower at that time, must pass the TAKS. It was at this point, when we realized that there had been considerable change in the landscape, that we decided it would be important to include Oregon’s Certificate of Initial Mastery assessment program in our study even though it was not technically an exam used to determine whether a student would earn a standard diploma.

Although NCLB does not require high stakes exams for individual students, it is possible that states with graduation exams might decide to use those exams for NCLB purposes. In fact, of the 27 states with graduation exams, 19 states indicate that their graduation tests are or will be used for dual purposes (i.e., both as an individual student accountability measure and as a system measure for NCLB).

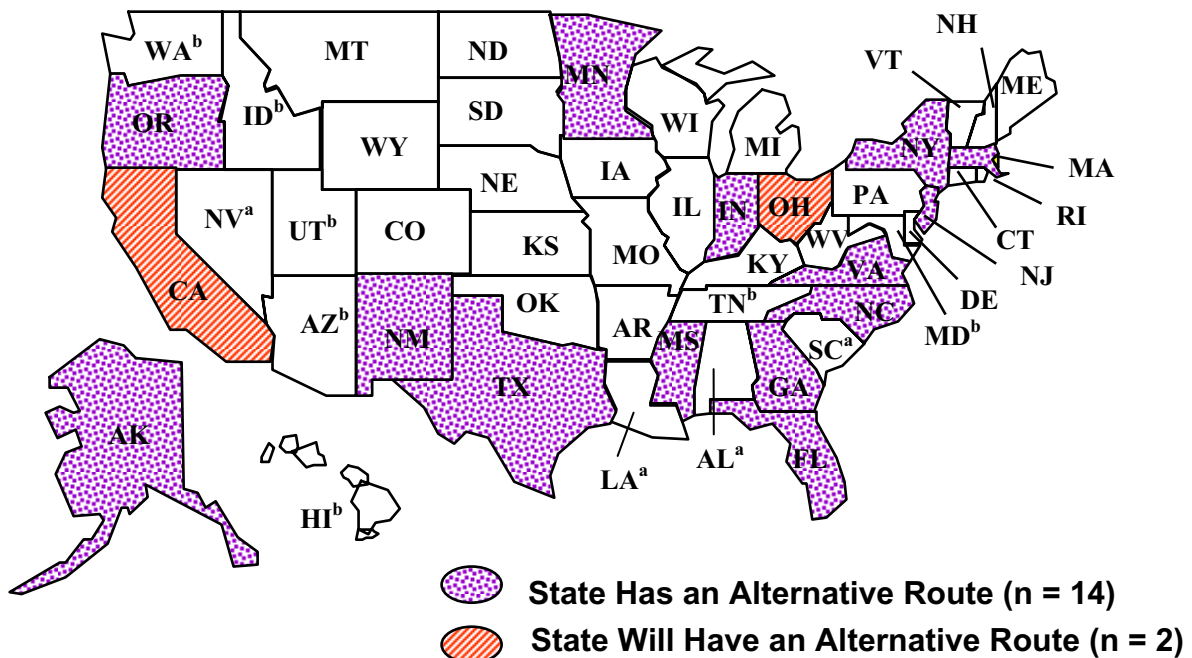
The fact that some states use the same exams for NCLB system accountability and for graduation exams potentially complicates the issue of whether an alternative route to the standard diploma is available. Not only are the purposes for the NCLB and graduation exams different, but the assessments themselves often are designed differently. Further, only the first administration of an assessment can be used for NCLB accountability, yet graduation exams frequently rely on the possibility of multiple opportunities for retesting.

There is a need to sort out the issues and answer questions specifically related to graduation exams. What happens when students need an alternative way to demonstrate their knowledge and skills? Are there alternative routes to a standard diploma for all students, and if so, what is the nature of these routes? Are there alternative routes for students with disabilities, and if so what is the nature of these routes?

Alternative Route States and Eligibility to Participate

Figure 1 indicates which states have an alternative route to a standard diploma, and which states are in the process of developing a procedure. The states reflected in this figure are those that were identified in the report *2003 State Special Education Outcomes* as having alternative routes, adjusted for our initial verification with the states as to the nature of the alternative route and whether it met the criterion of resulting in the student obtaining a standard diploma. In this figure, we include information for states that are in the planning process of implementation for an alternative route only if they had information about their process posted online in the fall of 2003. Thus, of the 27 states that have or will have exit exams (as shown in Table 1), 16 states reported that they have, or will have, some kind of alternative route to a standard diploma (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Alternative Routes to a Standard Diploma (2003-2004)



Note: Oregon's alternative route is for a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) rather than for a standard diploma.

^a Indicates a state with a graduation exam but no alternative route (n = 4).

^b Indicates a state that will have a graduation exam but has not yet defined its alternative route, or even whether it will have one (n = 7).

Four states have active exit exams and no alternative routes to a standard diploma. Those states (with the year of implementation of their high stakes tests) are: Alabama (1985), Louisiana (2003), Nevada (2003), and South Carolina (1990). There are seven states that indicated in response to the NCEO survey that their tests were not active yet, and they did not have plans for an alternative route at that time. Those states are: Arizona (2006), Hawaii (2008), Idaho (2005), Maryland (2008), Tennessee (2005), Utah (2007), and Washington (2008). Because these states did not indicate plans for an alternative route, we did not seek additional information from them.

A summary of the status of the 27 states originally identified as having an active or soon to be in place graduation exam (including Oregon, which has the Certificate of Initial Mastery), is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Status of Alternative Routes for Exit Exams

State	Alternative Route Available	Alternative Route Not Available	Test Not Active and No Plans Yet
Alabama		X	
Alaska	X		
Arizona			X
California ^a	X		
Florida	X		
Georgia	X		
Hawaii			X
Idaho			X
Indiana	X		
Louisiana		X	
Maryland			X
Massachusetts	X		
Minnesota ^b	X		
Mississippi	X		
Nevada		X	
New Jersey	X		
New Mexico	X		
New York	X		
North Carolina	X		
Ohio ^a	X		
Oregon ^c	X		
South Carolina		X	
Tennessee			X
Texas	X		

Table 2. Status of Alternative Routes for Exit Exams (continued)

State	Alternative Route Available	Alternative Route Not Available	Test Not Active and No Plans Yet
Utah			X
Virginia	X		
Washington			X
Totals	16	4	7

^a The state test is not yet active, but information was available on the state Web sites about an alternative route.

^b Minnesota indicates that while it does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, under limited circumstances, after February of the student's senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a "last chance" option to pass the test.

^c Oregon has an exam for a Certificate of Initial Mastery, rather than an exit exam. However, it has an alternative route for this process, so we included this information in our study.

Eligible Student Groups

We looked at the states that have an alternative route to determine whether it was available for all students (which includes students with disabilities), or only for certain subgroups of students, such as students with disabilities. We did this both for those states in which the alternative method was already being implemented, and for those in which it was yet to be implemented because the high stakes assessment was not yet active (but in which an alternative route was planned and designed).

Table 3 indicates the group or groups of students considered eligible for the alternative route to a standard diploma in the 16 states with some type of alternative route available. The table is divided into all students and students with disabilities, with the exact words that are used by the states entered into the table. This table also reveals the groups of students that states cover in general.

All but 3 of the 16 states have an alternative route available for all students, and 13 have an option intended for students with disabilities. Three states have created an alternative route available for all students (Georgia, Mississippi, and Oregon), without an additional alternative route specifically for students with disabilities. While Oregon does not technically have a high-stakes graduation exam, it has a test that leads to a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM). Three states (California, North Carolina, and Texas) have a process applicable only for students with disabilities with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. The most common approach is for states to have two alternative routes—one for students with disabilities and another for all students. Ten states (Alaska, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Virginia) take the two route approach (one for all students and one for students with disabilities).

Table 3. Students Targeted for Alternative Routes to Standard Diploma

State	Specifically Targeted Students	
	All Students	Students with Disabilities
Alaska	High school seniors	Students with IEP or 504 plan
California		Students with IEP or 504 plan
Florida	12th graders	12th grade students with IEP
Georgia	All students	
Indiana	All students	Students with IEP or 504 plan
Massachusetts	High school seniors	Students with IEP or 504 plan
Minnesota ^a	All students	Students with IEP or 504 plan
Mississippi	All students	
New Jersey	All students	Students with disabilities
New Mexico	All students	Students with IEP (504 can be considered)
New York	High school seniors	Students with disabilities
North Carolina		Students with IEP
Ohio	All students	Students with IEP
Oregon	All students in grades 9-12	
Texas		Students with IEP
Virginia	All students	Students with disabilities starting in grade 8

Note: Shaded cell indicates that an alternative route is not an option for this group of students in the state. For example, California does not have an alternative route for "all students"; in current plans, an alternative route will be available only to students with disabilities in California for the exit exam that becomes active in 2006.

^a Minnesota indicates that while it does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, under limited circumstances, after February of the student's senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a "last chance" option to pass the test.

As is evident in Table 3, in some states, both the all students group and the students with disabilities group are defined in a narrower way than simply the larger group. For example, for all students, four states (Alaska, Florida, Massachusetts, and New York) refer to either high school seniors or 12th graders. Oregon refers to all students in grades 9–12. Related to students with disabilities, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas do *not* include students on 504 plans, but instead refer to students on IEPs in their descriptions of students available for the alternative route. New Mexico indicates that 504 students might be considered, but technically are not covered by law. Other states (Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia) refer generally to students with disabilities (although Virginia puts a grade limit on the students—"starting in grade 8"). The remaining states (Alaska, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota) specifically refer to students with IEPs or 504 plans.

Initiating the Alternative Route to a Standard Diploma ---

Gaining entrance to the alternative route to a standard diploma does not happen automatically. Typically, there is a procedure that must be initiated by someone. Our review of state Web sites and follow-up state verification indicated considerable variability in whether this information was available or clear. When the information could be found, variability in who could initiate the process was evident.

Table 4 indicates who initiates the alternative route process when it is for all students (which can include students with disabilities) and when it is only for students with disabilities. For 3 of the 13 states in which an alternative route was available to all students, we were unable to find information that indicated who could initiate the alternative route process (Indiana, New York, and Ohio). In the remaining 10 states, the student or a family member only was the initiator in 3 states (Alaska, Georgia, and Oregon), an educator or other school personnel only could initiate in another 5 states (Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico and Virginia), and either family or school personnel could initiate in Minnesota and Mississippi. In Massachusetts, anyone (a parent, guardian, or educator) may request an appeal, but only the superintendent of schools or designee, or the director of an approved private special education school or collaborative may file an appeal (see profile in Appendix A). In Minnesota, after February of a student's senior year, a student, parent, or the district may request that a general education student take the graduation exam with accommodations, even though the student does not typically use accommodations for instruction.

Table 4 also indicates who initiates the alternative route process when it is for students with disabilities only. For 5 of the 12 states in which an alternative route was available specifically for students with disabilities, we were unable to find information that indicated who could initiate the alternative route process (Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas). In the remaining 7 states, the IEP or 504 team was specifically cited by 4 states (Alaska, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Virginia), the IEP team or the Superintendent of Schools may initiate the process in Florida, a parent or guardian in California, and the student's teacher (with principal authorization) in Indiana. In Massachusetts, a parent (or student over 18) may request an appeal and the superintendent must comply.

There may be specific criteria that have to be met as well. For example, students may or may not have to take the exit exam before an alternative route can be used; also, they may or may not have to earn a certain score or participate in remedial activities, or other activities.

Table 4. Initiator of Alternative Route

State	Who Initiates	
	For All Students	For Students with Disabilities
Alaska	Student, or student's parent or legal guardian	IEP or Section 504 team recommends
California		Parent or guardian
Florida	School guidance counselors	IEP team Superintendent of schools
Georgia	Student, parent(s), guardian	
Indiana	No information	Student's teacher, with principal's authorization
Massachusetts	Superintendent of school, or the director of an approved private special education school or collaborative files all appeals	Superintendent initiates, but for student with disabilities, a parent (or student over 18) may request an appeal and superintendent must comply
Minnesota ^a	Student, parent, or the district	No information
Mississippi	Student, parent, or district personnel	
New Jersey	Local district staff review the Individual Student Reports to see whether the student has demonstrated proficiency on the language arts literacy and/or the mathematics section of the High School Performance Assessment (HSPA). A student must have a partially proficient score in a HSPA content area in order to take the Special Review Assessment (SRA)	IEP team
New Mexico	District superintendent	IEP team
New York	No information	No information
North Carolina		No information
Ohio	No information	No information
Oregon	Parent, guardian, student	
Texas		No information
Virginia	Local school	IEP team, 504 committee

Note: Shaded cell indicates that an alternative route is not an option for this group of students in the state. For example, California does not have an alternative route for "all students"; in current plans, an alternative route will be available only to students with disabilities in California for the exit exam that becomes active in 2006.

^a Minnesota indicated that while it does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, under limited circumstances, after February of the student's senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a "last chance" option to pass the test.

Alternative Route Decision Making

Once the request is made to pursue an alternative route for obtaining a standard diploma, someone decides that either (a) the student may continue along the alternative route, or (b) the student has successfully met the requirements of the alternative route. Which type of decision made depends on the nature of the alternative route. Table 5 indicates the decision-making body or approver when the alternative route is for all students (which can include students with disabilities) and when it is only for students with disabilities.

Table 5. Decision-making Body/Approver for the Alternative Route

State	Decision-maker/Approver	
	For All Students	For Students with Disabilities
Alaska	Panel of three members appointed by Commissioner	Department of Education reviews application and if procedures have been followed, the Optional Assessment is approved
California		Local Board of Education
Florida	State Commissioner	IEP team Commissioner of Education
Georgia	State Superintendent of Schools	
Indiana	No information	Case Conference Committee
Massachusetts	MCAS Performance Appeals Board makes recommendation to the Commissioner	MCAS Performance Appeals Board makes recommendation to the Commissioner
Minnesota	District determines	IEP team
Mississippi	State Appeals of Substitute Evaluation Committee	
New Jersey	The SRA Performance Assessment Tests (PATs) are scored by item-specific rubrics. If two SRA panel members' scores disagree by more than one point, a third content-certified panel member must score the response. The new PAT score is derived by taking the mean of (for reading or math) or summing (for writing) the two highest contiguous scores. If no two of the three scores are in agreement, the student must complete another PAT	IEP team
New Mexico	State Secretary of Education	IEP team
New York	No Information	No Information
North Carolina		No Information

Table 5. Decision-making Body/Approver for the Alternative Route (continued)

State	Decision-maker/Approver	
	For All Students	For Students with Disabilities
Ohio	No Information	No Information
Oregon	Impartial Panel of Experts	
Texas		No Information
Virginia	Local school	IEP team/504 committee

Note: Shaded cell indicates that an alternative route is not an option for this group of students in the state. For example, California does not have an alternative route for “all students”; in current plans, an alternative route will be available only to students with disabilities in California for the exit exam that becomes active in 2006.

Procedures used for all students often are different from those used for the subgroup of students with disabilities. For example, Alaska’s appeals process for all students uses a panel of three members appointed by the Commissioner of Education to determine whether to grant the appeal. Mississippi has a State Appeals of Substitute Evaluation Committee, and New Jersey has a Special Review Assessment (SRA) Panel that follows item-specific rubrics to make a determination. Oregon relies on an impartial panel of experts. Virginia leaves the decision to the local school. School districts make the determination (including the procedures used) in Minnesota.

Georgia and New Mexico give the power to decide or approve to the State Superintendent, as does Massachusetts with an MCAS Performance Appeals Board making a recommendation. Florida allows the State Commissioner to authorize an alternative test, although the legislature may remove that power. The process of decision-making in four states (Indiana, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio) was unclear on their Web sites, and remained so after verification for those states that confirmed their information.

Table 5 also indicates who makes the decision for the processes involving students with disabilities. In four states (Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Virginia), the IEP team determines whether the alternative method of achieving a diploma is approved. In Florida, the IEP team determines one alternative process and the Commissioner of Education has the responsibility for approving another process. In Indiana, the decision is made by the student’s case conference committee. For Alaska’s Optional Assessment, the Department of Education reviews the application; if the procedures have been followed, the Optional Assessment is approved. In California, the local Board of Education had responsibility for approving or denying alternative routes at the time of our study. The process of decision-making for students with disabilities was unclear on the Web sites of four states (New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas).

Nature of Alternative Routes to a Standard Diploma ---

There are many variations of alternative routes to achieve a standard diploma. It is difficult to generalize about these processes without understanding the specific criteria and requirements of the various alternative routes. Table 6 includes the name of each state’s alternative route, as well as a brief description of the process. These descriptions are based on the profiles in Appendix A. The information contained in Table 6 was verified by the states (via the profile), and specifically highlights the alternative route available for all students. More detailed information is provided in the State Profiles, as well as on the states’ Web sites (see Appendix B).

Table 6. Nature of the Alternative Route for All Students

State	Alternative Route Process	
	Name of Alternative	Description of Process or Conditions
Alaska	Waiver from High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE)	A student may receive a waiver if he or she arrives in Alaska with two or fewer semesters remaining in the student’s year of intended graduation. Or, a student has a “rare and unusual circumstance” which consists only of: (1) the death of the student’s parent(s) if the death occurs within the last semester of the student’s year of intended graduation; (2) a serious and sudden illness or physical injury that prevents the student from taking the HSGQE; (3) a disability arising in the student’s high school career and the disability arises too late to develop a meaningful and valid alternative assessment (request for a waiver may only be granted if the waiver is consistent with IEP); or (4) a significant and uncorrectable system error. Or, a student has passed another state’s competency examination.
California	No alternative route for “all students”	
Florida	Alternative Test	Other standardized tests, such as SAT and ACT college entrance exams can count as comparable to passing scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).
Georgia	Waiver/Variance	Request for waiver/variance must include a statement of what will be accomplished in lieu of requirements, reason for the request, and permission for the student’s records to be reviewed.
Indiana	CORE 40 (Waiver from Graduation Qualifying Exam proficiency standard)	Student successfully completes academically challenging courses in English, mathematics, science, and social studies, and earns at least a C in all required and elective courses. [Not verified by state]

Table 6. Nature of the Alternative Route for All Students (continued)

<p>Indiana (continued)</p>	<p>Appeal Test Results</p>	<p>Student meets State Board criteria (takes exam in each subject area; completes all remediation opportunities; minimum attendance of 95%; minimum C average in courses required for graduation), plus must obtain written recommendation from teacher in subject area(s) where did not get passing score on Graduation Qualifying Exam, and principal must agree with recommendation, with documentation provided to ensure student has attained the academic standard based on other tests or classroom work. Student must satisfy all other state and local graduation requirements. [Not verified by state]</p>
<p>Massachusetts</p>	<p>MCAS Performance Appeals</p>	<p>Eligibility: Student must have 95% attendance during previous and current school years: must have taken the MCAS test(s) three times; must have scored 216 or 218 at least once (no minimum score for a student with a disability); and must have participated in MCAS tutoring or other academic support. Performance requirements: grade point average must meet or exceed GPA of a “cohort” of six or more students who passed the MCAS. Methods of Appeal: Cohort Analysis or Student Portfolio, when a cohort does not exist, for all students.</p>
<p>Minnesota</p>	<p>No official state-approved alternative route</p>	<p>Minnesota does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, but under limited circumstances, after February of the student’s senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a “last chance” option to pass the test.</p>
<p>Mississippi</p>	<p>Appeals/substitute evaluation</p>	<p>Student is eligible when a student, parent, or district personnel has reason to believe a student has mastered the subject area curriculum, but was unable for two separate administrations to demonstrate mastery on the statewide Subject Area Testing Program; if the appeal is approved, the student is allowed to take a substitute evaluation, which is then judged to determine whether it demonstrates mastery of the curriculum.</p>
<p>New Jersey</p>	<p>Special Review Assessment (SRA)</p>	<p>The SRA is an individually, locally administered, state-developed assessment. Each SRA question (known as a Performance Assessment Task or PAT) is aligned to the High School Proficiency Assessment content. The student must obtain a partially proficient score on the HSPA to qualify for the SRA process. The student must also participate in a school-designed SRA instructional program for that content area. Students may take an SRA PAT once. If a student is not successful on a specified PAT, additional PATs may be administered until the student successfully completes the required number of PATs.</p>

Table 6. Nature of the Alternative Route for All Students (continued)

New Mexico	Waiver	Waiver may be requested for any student, but there must be documentation of attainment of competencies through other standardized assessment measures.
New York	No information	Students may take other tests in place of Regents Tests—Advanced Placement test, SAT II, International Baccalaureate test. [Not verified by state]
North Carolina	No alternative route for “all students”	
Ohio	Appeal	Student must pass 4 of the 5 tests, 97% attendance rate, 2.5 GPA, completed curriculum requirements, participate in intervention programs with 97% attendance, and have letters recommending graduation from high school principal and each high school teacher in subject area not yet passed. [Not verified by state]
Oregon	Juried State Assessment	Three types of evidence fall within the Juried State Assessment: (1) A Collection of Evidence to the ODE for review; (2) A Modification Request to determine if a modification used during the administration of a state test should be considered an accommodation for the student for each particular test; or (3) A Proficiency-Based Admissions Standards System (PASS) transcript as evidence of having met CIM standards by meeting the corresponding PASS Standards in a content area. [Not verified by state]
Texas	No alternative route for “all students”	
Virginia	Substitute Tests	Substitute tests may be taken for verified credit, which then can be counted for Standards of Learning (SOL) end of course exams. The state provides a list of SOL Substitute Tests for Verified Credit. It includes tests like AP exams, ACT, SATII, etc.

Table 7 provides similar information about the alternative routes to a standard diploma for students with disabilities. In general, the options for students with disabilities are different from those for all students. References to the IEP are among the most striking difference. Still, even with this commonality in the processes for students with disabilities, there is a range of options that states are using for this group of students.

Table 8 provides a summary of whether each of the options first requires the student to take the general assessment, and by inference, to fail the exit exam, before having access to the alternative route to the standard diploma. In the table, the options for all students are positioned beside those available to students with disabilities only. It is noteworthy that there is little symmetry within states that have alternative routes both for all students and for students with disabilities only in terms of whether the student must first take the general assessment. In fact, in the 10 states that have alternative routes to standard diplomas for all students and for students with disabilities,

less than half had the same pattern (Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia). A total of 6 states of 13 require all students to first fail the exit exam, while 5 states of 13 require students with disabilities to first fail the exit exam.

Table 7. Nature of the Alternative Route for Students with Disabilities

State	Alternative Route Process	
	Name of Alternative	Description of Process or Conditions
Alaska	Optional Assessment (OA)	To participate in an OA, a student must have attempted to pass all sections of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) with or without accommodations, be recommended by the IEP or 504 team, have approval in writing to take the OA, have a copy of the IEP or 504 plan, only take the OA for the content areas for which the student received a below or not-proficient score. OAs are changes to the administration of the HSGQE, not to the content or the format. Administration changes include use of four function calculator, asking test proctor for clarification about test questions, allowing signer to interpret test questions for a deaf student, allowing use of a spell checker on word processor, allowing use of dictionary or thesaurus.
California	Waiver	Student with IEP or Section 504 plan who takes the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) with a modification determined to fundamentally alter what the test measures and receives the equivalent of a passing score (350 or higher) may request waiver of the requirement to successfully pass that section of CAHSEE.
Florida	Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Waiver	Legislation provides for waiver of the Grade 10 FCAT for students with disabilities whose abilities cannot be accurately measured by the FCAT.
	Special Exemption	Exemption under extraordinary circumstances that would cause the test to reflect student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills rather than the student's achievement. Note: Students who are granted an exemption must meet all other criteria for graduation with a standard diploma.
Georgia	No alternative route for students with disabilities only	
Indiana	Waiver	Student's case conference committee recommends that requirements be waived and demonstrates that student has attained the academic standard. Student must meet specific criteria, including retaking exam in subject areas which he or she did not pass, as often as required by IEP, completes remediation, maintains school attendance of 95%, maintains C average or equivalent, satisfies all other state and local graduation requirements. [Not verified by state]

Table 7. Nature of the Alternative Route for Students with Disabilities (continued)

State	Alternative Route Process	
	Name of Alternative	Description of Process or Conditions
Massachusetts	Alternate Assessment	“Competency portfolio” may be submitted in lieu of taking MCAS tests for students with disabilities who have been designated for alternate assessment by their IEP or 504 team.
Minnesota	(No Name)	Test may be modified or scores may be lowered.
Mississippi	No alternative route for students with disabilities only	
New Jersey	IEP Exemption	Students must take the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) at least once in each content area before qualifying for exemption.
New Mexico	Graduation Pathways (Standard, Career Readiness, and Ability)	For students who do not achieve a passing score on the graduation exam, three pathways are available. For the standard pathway, the IEP team selects courses and electives based on the student’s post-school goals, interests, and needs; the student must pass the exit exam. For the career readiness path, the students must take the exam, but the score that must be achieved is determined by the IEP team. The ability pathway is for students with significant cognitive or physical disabilities; these students must take the exit exam or the state alternate exam and meet IEP team determined criteria.
New York	Regents Competency Test	A safety net provision allows students with disabilities who fail the Regents Exam to take and pass the Regents Competency Test to earn a local diploma. This option is available until 2010. [Not verified by state]
North Carolina	Occupational course of study	IEP team determines the criteria.
Ohio	(No Name)	Students whose IEP excuses them from the consequence of having to pass the OGT may be awarded a diploma. [Not verified by state]
Oregon	No alternative route for students with disabilities only [Not verified by state]	
Texas	(No Name)	Student receiving special education services who successfully completes the requirements of his or her IEP shall receive a high school diploma.
Virginia	Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP)	The VSEP consists of a student’s Course Work Compilation (CWC), a selection of student work that demonstrates to the review panel that the student has demonstrated proficiency in the Standards of Learning for a specific course/content area. The student must have a current IEP or 504 plan, be enrolled in a course that has an SOL test or be pursuing a modified standard diploma, and the impact of the student’s disability demonstrates that the student will not be able to access the SOL assessments even with standard or non-standard testing accommodations.

Table 8. Summary of Whether Alternative Route Requires Student to First Take (and Fail) the General Assessment

State	All Students		Students with Disabilities	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Alaska		X	X	
California			X	
Florida		X		X ^a
Georgia				
Indiana	X ^b	X ^b	X	
Massachusetts	X			X ^c
Minnesota	X			X
Mississippi	X			
New Jersey	X		X	
New Mexico		X	X	
New York		X		X
North Carolina				X
Ohio	X			X
Oregon		X		
Texas				X
Virginia		X		X
Total	6	8	5	8

^a Florida provides two alternative routes. See Table 7.

^b Indiana provides two alternative routes. See Table 6.

^c Students with significant disabilities whose IEP or 504 team designate them for participation in the alternate assessment also have the option of moving to the “all students” alternative route (the performance appeal), but only after attempting the alternate “competency portfolio” at least twice.

Table 9 synthesizes the specific nature of alternative routes to a standard diploma for all students in terms of whether the route involves (a) taking a different test, (b) completing a specific curriculum, (c) using a different method of demonstrating proficiency, or (d) obtaining a waiver from requirements. Indiana is the only state that had two alternative routes available to all students. As a result, it has two checks in this table, and the totals in the columns for different test, different curriculum, different method, and waiver will add together to give a number (total = 14) that is larger than the number of states that have alternative routes for all students (n = 13).

Five states (Florida, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Virginia) allow students to use other tests to demonstrate competency. A Florida statute initially permitted this option only for the 2003 school year, but the alternative was extended for another year and will be studied for future years. In New Jersey, high school students who do not pass the High School Proficiency Assessments (HSPA) may take the SRA after participating in a school-designed instructional program for the content area in question. Local school district staff review the Individual Student Reports to see whether the student has demonstrated proficiency on the language arts and/or the

mathematics section of the HSPA. A student must have a partially proficient score in an HSPA content area in order to qualify to take the SRA. New York allows students to take an Advanced Placement test, SAT II, or International Baccalaureate test in lieu of the Regents Exam. In Virginia, students who do not pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course exams may retake an alternative form of the test immediately, or may take a substitute test.

Table 9. Alternative Routes for All Students

State	Different Test	Different Curriculum	Different Method of Demonstrating Competency	Waiver
Alaska				✓ ^m
Florida	✓ ^a			
Georgia				✓ ⁿ
Indiana		✓ ^f	✓ ^g	
Massachusetts			✓ ^h	
Minnesota			✓ ⁱ	
Mississippi			✓ ^j	
New Jersey	✓ ^b			
New Mexico	✓ ^c			
New York	✓ ^d			
Ohio			✓ ^k	
Oregon			✓ ^l	
Virginia	✓ ^e			
Total	5	1	6	2

Note: The total obtained from adding across the columns in this table (total = 14) is greater than the number of states (n = 13) because Indiana has two alternative routes available for all students.

^a Standardized tests, including SAT, ACT, College Placement Test, PSAT, PLAN, and tests used for entry into the military (available by statute for 2003 only, but extended for another year).

^b A locally administered, state-developed test made up of performance assessment tasks that are administered in a familiar setting, with additional required instruction.

^c In very limited circumstances, statute permits students to demonstrate competency through other standardized measures (considered a “waiver”).

^d Advanced Placement test, SAT II, International Baccalaureate test.

^e State provides list of substitute tests including AP exams, ACT, SAT II, etc.

^f CORE 40 curriculum-students must successfully complete all courses earning at least a “C.”

^g Recommendation based on other tests or classroom work.

^h Performance appeal in which grades are compared with those of a cohort; if sufficient number in cohort are not available, then a portfolio is developed.

ⁱ State does not have an approved alternative route for all students, but a school district may permit a student without an IEP or 504 plan, after February in his or her senior year, to take the graduation exam with accommodations after repeated unsuccessful attempts.

^j Substitute evaluation with supporting evidence.

^k May pass one fewer test but must meet additional criteria.

^l Juried assessment (Classroom based work samples before expert panel).

^m Waiver under very specific, limited conditions such as death of parent, serious illness, etc.

ⁿ Waiver must include what will be accomplished in lieu of requirements and permission to review student’s records.

New Mexico allows the use of an alternative test only in limited instances with extenuating circumstances. For example, if a student transferred from another state and had not taken “New Mexico History,” the superintendent could request a waiver for that portion of the test, and submit evidence of competencies demonstrated through other standardized assessment measures. However, this option is used very sparingly and approved on a case-by-case basis.

Only one state had an alternative route to the standard diploma that was based only on completing a specific curriculum. Indiana has an alternative known as the Core 40 curriculum. The student’s principal must certify within a month of the student’s graduation date that the student has successfully completed all of the Core 40 requirements with at least a “C” grade. A student who does not pass the Graduation Qualifying Exam, and who does not meet the requirements of Core 40 may graduate by successfully appealing the test results under specific criteria adopted by the Board of Education. The student may be eligible to appeal if he or she has taken the graduation exam, completed all remediation opportunities provided by the school, maintained a minimum attendance rate of 95%, maintained a “C” average in all courses required for graduation, and has obtained a written recommendation from the student’s teacher in each subject area in which the student has not achieved a passing score. The principal must verify this information and documentation must be provided to ensure that the student has achieved the academic standard in the subject area based on tests other than the graduation exam or classroom work.

Six states have other approaches of demonstrating competency (Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio, and Oregon). In Indiana, students who have not passed the test may appeal their results and earn a diploma by meeting all other graduation requirements and obtaining written recommendations from teachers in subject areas where a passing score was not obtained, and an agreement from the principal, as well as completing other requirements. Massachusetts has a performance appeal that involves the student comparing his or her grades to that of a cohort of students who have passed the MCAS. If a cohort of sufficient size is not available for comparison, then the student submits a portfolio.

Minnesota does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, but under limited circumstances, after February of the student’s senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a ‘last chance’ option to pass the test, even if the student does not typically use accommodations for instruction. Mississippi allows all students who appear to have “mastered the subject area curriculum, but who were unable for two separate administrations to demonstrate mastery on the Subject Area Test,” to have the opportunity for an appeal. If a student does not pass the test, the student, the parent, or district personnel may appeal for a substitute evaluation. If the results of the substitute evaluation determine that the student has mastered the curriculum, a passing score will be substituted for a failing score on the Subject Area Test, and the Mississippi Department of Education will absorb the cost associated with the substitute evaluation.

In Ohio, the student must meet an array of criteria as an alternative to passing the high school graduation exam that consists of 5 tests. The student must pass 4 of the 5 tests, have a 97% attendance rate, have a 2.5 GPA, complete all the curriculum requirements, participate in intervention programs with a 97% attendance rate, and have letters recommending graduation from the high school principal and each high school teacher in subject areas not yet passed.

In Oregon, the State Board established an alternative pathway to the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) for students who are unable to demonstrate mastery on one or more statewide assessments required for the CIM. Students in the alternative are evaluated on a collection of classroom-based work samples through a process known as a juried assessment.

Two states have waiver provisions. In Alaska, it is possible for certain students to earn a diploma without passing the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE). Students in the “waiver” group include those who met the criteria of “rare and unusual circumstances,” such as the death of a student’s parent(s) if in the last semester of the student’s year of graduation, a sudden or serious illness or injury, or having passed a similar test in another state. Georgia makes reference to waiver provisions for students who do not pass the examinations, although the criteria are unclear on the Web site. There is a list of information that must be submitted to indicate what will be accomplished through a waiver or variance, the reason for the request, and permission for a record review.

Table 10 summarizes the specific nature of alternative routes to a standard diploma for students with disabilities in terms of whether the route involves (a) taking a different test, (b) completing a specific curriculum, (c) using a different method of demonstrating proficiency, or (d) obtaining a waiver from requirements. One state (Florida) has two alternative routes for students with disabilities, and thus two checks have been entered for these two alternative routes. Both fall within the same category even though they have different names and are carried out in slightly different ways. Because of the two checks, the totals in the columns for different test, different curriculum, different method of demonstrating competency, and waiver will add together to give a number (total = 14) that is larger than the number of states that have alternative routes for students with disabilities (n = 13). Considering the table overall, and compared to Table 9, it is evident that the overall distribution of states across the types of alternative routes is quite different for students with disabilities compared to all students.

Three states (Alaska, Minnesota, and New York) provide options that rely on different tests. For students with disabilities in Alaska, there is an Optional Assessment (OA) available to obtain a regular high school diploma. These students must have been unsuccessful when they took the high school graduation examination, and also must meet several other criteria in order to take the OA as an alternative to getting a high school diploma (see Alaska State Profile in Appendix A). In Minnesota, the graduation test may be modified or passing scores may be lowered for

Table 10. Alternative Routes for Students with Disabilities

State	Different Test	Different Curriculum	Different Method of Demonstrating Competency	Waiver
Alaska	✓ ^a			
California				✓ ⁱ
Florida				✓✓ ^j
Indiana			✓ ^f	
Massachusetts			✓ ^g	
Minnesota	✓ ^b			
New Jersey				✓ ^k
New Mexico		✓ ^d		
New York	✓ ^c			
North Carolina		✓ ^e		
Ohio				✓ ^l
Texas				✓ ^m
Virginia			✓ ^h	
Total	3	2	3	6

Note: The total obtained from adding across the columns in this table (total = 14) is greater than the number of states (n = 13) because Florida has two alternative routes available for students with disabilities.

^a Optional Assessments are changes to the administration of the high school test, not to the content or format, i.e., using spell-checker, allowing student to ask questions of proctor, etc.

^b Tests may be modified or scores may be lowered.

^c The Regents Competency Exam is a safety net option for students to earn a local diploma.

^d Career readiness pathway allows for student to pass with a score pre-determined by the IEP team; ability pathway is for students with severe cognitive disabilities and/or physical disabilities, or students with severe mental health challenges who must take either the exit exam or the alternate assessment and meet IEP pre-determined level of competency.

^e Occupational course of study with criteria determined by IEP team.

^f As recommended by teachers, tests other than Graduation Qualifying Exam or classroom work.

^g Portfolio assessment.

^h Portfolio assessment.

ⁱ Waiver for a portion of the test may be requested for students who take the exit exam with modifications that change what the test measures, and who meet a minimum score.

^j Exemption available for students with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, if they meet all other criteria for graduation; waiver available for those students whose abilities cannot be accurately measured by the exit exam.

^k Exemption after taking (and failing) high school exit exam at least once.

^l IEP exemption.

^m IEP determined criteria for diploma.

students with disabilities. Exemptions and individual passing scores are based on the student’s IEP or 504 plan and the recommendation of the IEP team. New York has a “safety net” for students with disabilities who fail the Regents graduation exam. This provision allows students to take and pass the Regents Competency Test to earn a local diploma. This alternative method has been extended through the 2009–2010 school year.

Two states (New Mexico and North Carolina) provide options that rely on the use of a different curriculum to demonstrate proficiency and meet the requirements of a standard diploma. New Mexico offers alternative pathways—standard pathway, career readiness pathway, and ability pathway—as a means to achieve a regular diploma or certificate of achievement. If the IEP team recommends a pathway other than the standard one, the team must provide documentation for selecting the alternative pathway. All students must still take the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE), except for those with the most severe cognitive disabilities who would take the alternate assessment. However, the IEP team can adjust the level of passing required for individual students with disabilities based on their IEP or 504 plan. The career readiness pathway focuses on the student’s interests, career preferences, and needs in determining selection of appropriate classes. The ability pathway is an individual program based on meeting or surpassing IEP goals and objectives. North Carolina also offers an occupational course of study for students with an IEP. However, no exit exam is required for students who are following the occupational course of study.

Three states (Indiana, Massachusetts, and Virginia) have different methods of demonstrating competency. In Indiana, the case conference committee of a student with a disability or 504 plan who does not pass the Graduation Qualifying Exam may determine that the student is eligible to graduate if he or she meets several very specific criteria, including a 95% attendance rate, maintaining at least a “C” average, and otherwise satisfying all state and local graduation requirements. In Massachusetts, a “competency portfolio” may be submitted in lieu of taking MCAS tests for students with disabilities who have been designated for alternate assessment by their IEP or 504 team. In Virginia, students must accrue verified credits. A verified credit is granted if students pass the class and the corresponding Standards of Learning (SOL) test. Students with disabilities who cannot be accommodated on the regular SOL tests can take a portfolio assessment called the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP).

Five states (California, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas) have a waiver provision for students with disabilities. Florida actually has two different types of waivers, and thus was given two checks in Table 10. The ENNOBLES Act of Florida is legislation that provides for the waiver of the Grade 10 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for students with disabilities whose abilities cannot be measured accurately by the FCAT. The student’s IEP team may request a waiver of the FCAT requirement if that student meets all requirements set forth in the ENNOBLES Act. In addition to this waiver option, Florida also has a Special Exemption for “extraordinary circumstances” that allows the student to be exempt from “any or all sections of the test required for high school graduation with a standard diploma.” Students who are granted an exemption must meet all other criteria for graduation with a standard diploma.

The waiver options in other states are more like the first waiver option in Florida. California’s high stakes testing is not scheduled to begin until 2006. The plans indicated on the Web site

provide the opportunity for a waiver only for students with disabilities. Students with an IEP or 504 plan who take the California test with modifications that fundamentally alter the test and what it purports to measure, and who receive a score of 350 or higher, may request a waiver for the portion of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). They would still qualify for a regular diploma. California is currently conducting a study to determine specifically how this process will be implemented.

In Ohio and Texas, students whose IEP excuses them from having to pass the exit exams may be awarded a diploma if they successfully complete the requirements of their IEP.

Comparability of Alternative Routes and Standard Routes ---

We classified the alternative routes to a standard diploma according to whether they were comparable to the standard route to the diploma. This classification was a judgment based on the information available on state Web sites and through the verification process. The states were classified as having comparable alternative routes to the standard route to earning a diploma if the state Web site or other public documents directly specified so via the following semantic identifiers: same standards, same criteria, meeting equivalent standards. The following identifiers indicated non-comparability: lower, waiver, exemption, fewer tests.

The criteria that we used were admittedly a very broad reflection of the comparability of an alternative route to a standard route. Yet, we believed the first line of credibility had to be what was presented to the public—therefore, our insistence on using only information that was publicly available and had at least face-value validity.

Table 11 lists the alternative routes for all students and for students with disabilities, indicating our judgment of the alternative route as comparable, as non-comparable (i.e., less rigorous) to the standard route, or “unclear” because not enough information was available. As indicated in the table, the alternative routes for all students tended to be comparable to the standard route (10 of 14), whereas those for students with disabilities tended to be non-comparable (8 of 14). Recall that this calculation included two alternative routes for all students in Indiana, both of which were judged to be comparable, and two alternative routes for students with disabilities in Florida, one of which was judged to be not comparable and one of which was judged to be comparable.

Table 11 includes footnotes that either clarify our judgments or note the concerns or comments of states about the judgments. Those states in bold letters disagreed in some way with our judgment. Some of these states indicated that comparability was reflected in the alternative process, even though not stated in public documents or on the Web site. At least one of these

states suggested that we analyze the specific requirements that students had to meet; others suggested that comparability was implied by the lack of statements about not having to meet the same standard.

Table 11. Comparability of Alternative Route and Standard Diploma Route

State	All Students			Students with Disabilities		
	Comparable	Not Comparable	Unclear	Comparable	Not Comparable	Unclear
Alaska ^a		X		X		
California ^b						X
Florida ^c	X			X	X	
Georgia ^d			X			
Indiana ^e	XX			X		
Massachusetts	X			X		
Minnesota ^f		X			X	
Mississippi	X					
New Jersey	X				X	
New Mexico ^g	X				X	
New York	X				X	
North Carolina ^h					X	
Ohio*			X		X	
Oregon*	X					
Texas					X	
Virginia	X			X		
Total	10	2	2	5	8	1

Note: States in bold letters disagreed in some way with our judgment about comparability.

^a Alaska's alternative for all students is allowed only under special circumstances, such as death in family, move from another state.

^b California is currently undergoing a legislatively-mandated study to determine its final criteria for students with disabilities.

^c Florida has two alternative routes for students with disabilities that we did not judge to be of the same comparability. The waiver is not comparable to the standard route to a diploma. The special exemption allows for exemption from the graduation test "under extraordinary circumstances that create a situation where the results of administration of the graduation test would reflect a student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills rather than the student's achievement" (State Board of Education Rule). These situations are rare and the Department may receive one to two per year; this is judged to be comparable.

^d Georgia disagreed with our designation of unclear, but was unable to satisfy our requirements for public documentation of comparability.

^e Indiana has two alternative routes for all students: a different curriculum (the Core 40), and recommendations based on other tests or classroom work. We judged both of these to be comparable based on the state's descriptions.

^f Minnesota does not have an alternative route for general education students at the state level, but under limited circumstances, after February of the student's senior year, a local school district can make accommodations options available as a "last chance" option to pass the test.

^g New Mexico indicated that it believes all of its alternative routes are intended to be "comparable." However, the description of the process for the Career Readiness pathway specifically requires students to "achieve a level of competency or targeted proficiency that is pre-determined by the IEP team," which by our criteria would indicate "not comparable."

^h North Carolina disagreed with our designation of not comparable, but was unable to satisfy our requirements for public documentation of comparability.

* Did not respond to request for verification.

Discussion

Controversy surrounds many graduation exams today, in part because they are being tied to more rigorous standards than the minimum competency tests of the 1980s. Questions have been raised about their cost effectiveness (Center on Education Policy, 2004), the rigor of the tests themselves (Achieve, 2004a, 2004b), and the value of the tests for targeting resources to those students who need them most to successfully complete school (Greene & Winters, 2004). Despite this controversy, increasing numbers of states have decided to adopt graduation exams to determine whether students will receive standard diplomas. The purpose of the study summarized in this report was to identify the alternative routes to the standard diploma that are available to students in those states with graduation exams.

We found that of the 27 states with currently active or soon-to-be active graduation exams, 16 had or planned to have—*at the time that we conducted our study at the end of 2003*—an alternative route to the standard diploma for students in their states. Only two of these states were in the planning phase; 14 states had existing alternative routes to the standard diploma. Of the 16 states, 10 had identified routes for “all students” and another route just for “students with disabilities.” The tendency of states to identify special routes for their students with disabilities is something that deserves further study and was, in fact, part of the reason for this study. It is important to determine both the mechanics of the routes (both for all students and for only students with disabilities) but also the comparability of the routes. Does the route that is available to students with disabilities reflect the same standards as that available to all students, or is the standard in some way less rigorous?

We found that states’ options for earning diplomas in ways other than the standard route are quite complex and multi-faceted. It is likely that because of the importance of the alternative routes, legislators, governors, state boards of education, and state departments of education all weigh in on them, and thus, the alternatives are in flux. Much information about alternative routes was vague or missing from Web sites, and verification did not always improve the amount or clarity of information that we had in many cases.

It is also still difficult, especially for the novice, to distinguish the alternative routes to a standard diploma from alternate assessments meant for students with significant cognitive disabilities. The language surrounding the two kinds of assessments often is not clear. This confusion has been carried into some reports that summarize graduation requirements, where an alternative route is identified that really is a state’s alternate assessment meant for students with significant cognitive disabilities, which really has nothing to do with the state’s graduation requirements.

There is a wide array of procedures that states have adopted for their alternative routes. This is reflected in the initiator of the alternative route, the decision-making body or approver of the

alternative route request, and the nature of the alternative route itself. It was interesting to see that for all students, the alternative route most often involved taking a different test (n = 5) or by demonstrating competency in a different way (n = 6). Alternative methods included portfolios, grade comparisons, and juried assessments. In only a few states was a different curriculum or a waiver mentioned as the alternative route to the standard diploma.

For students with disabilities, the array of alternative routes looks considerably different. For example, most states (n = 5) have a waiver option for students with disabilities (6 alternative routes because Florida has two types of waivers). Next most frequent are different test (n = 3), different method of demonstrating competency (n = 3), and different curriculum (n = 2). In fact, when we conducted an analysis of the comparability of the standard route to the standard diploma and the alternative route to the standard diploma—based on the descriptions provided by the states—we judged that 10 of the 14 alternative routes (71%) available to all students were comparable to the standard route, while only 5 of the 14 alternative routes (35%) available to students with disabilities were comparable.

As we assembled information found on Web sites, we also examined the findings of other recent studies (see Appendix C), which included *National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options for Youth with Disabilities* (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003), which reported data collected in April of 2002, the document *State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test*, which used data collected in April and May of 2003, and *Education Week's Quality Counts 2004*, which collected information in late 2003. Several inconsistencies were found in information about graduation exams and about alternatives available for those exams. In some cases, the inconsistencies could be attributed to different people providing information for the various studies; in other instances, the discrepancies were due to changes that occur over time in this rapidly evolving policy area. In still others, the inconsistencies may be due to misunderstandings of the concepts involved.

It is important to emphasize that the information in this rapidly changing area is a snapshot in time. Nearly every week articles appear in *Education Week*, as well as in local newspapers, focusing on the impact of high stakes testing and portending possible modifications to existing laws and regulations. For example, an April 16, 2004, article (Associated Press, 2004) indicated that Alaska high school seniors with disabilities would not need to pass the state's new high school exam to graduate in the spring. This ruling came as a result of a class-action lawsuit that charged that the exam put students with disabilities at a disadvantage. On May 6, 2004, the *Dallas Morning News* indicated that there was a little known provision in an education finance bill that would eliminate the high school TAKS test completely, replacing it with a new series of 13 course-specific tests tied to classes. The article stated that one reason lawmakers were considering replacing the TAKS was because last year about half of all high school juniors failed at least one section. While the results of the test were not in as of this writing, the article indicated

that approximately 100,000 students would be at risk of not graduating next year. There was no indication in the article of whether there would be alternative methods of achieving a high school diploma under this new proposal.

While there is much flux surrounding graduation exams themselves and the alternative routes that are available for them, there does not seem to be a push to remove the non-comparable routes that are available to students with disabilities. This raises several questions. Is it okay in the current context of accountability to essentially waive graduation requirements for students with disabilities in those states that have a graduation exam? When requirements are waived, is there some indication that this has occurred? For example, students with disabilities who pass at a lower score level in Minnesota receive a standard diploma but it is noted on the students' records that they "passed—individual level." We found no evidence that other states with similar alternative routes had this kind of designation to indicate to employers or higher education officials that the student had earned the standard diploma at a different standard of proficiency from other students.

Thurlow and Thompson (2000) proposed that it was important to have the same diploma options available to all students, and that if more than one diploma option existed the names of those options should correspond to the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the student. For example, they suggested names just as Comprehensive Diploma, Course Completion Diploma, and Certificate of Attendance. Few states seemed to have taken this approach. Delaware is one state that adopted this type of approach in 2000, with its three types of diplomas: basic, standard, and distinguished. Yet, this three-tier system is causing controversy about whether it is right to tie the diploma so closely to one standardized test (Davis, 2004). And Delaware is not a state with an alternative route to a diploma, so the question of whether there is a need to identify when a student has taken an alternative route to obtain a diploma could be even more controversial.

Recommendations for Alternative Routes to a Standard Diploma

Several recommendations emerge from our analysis of states' approaches to providing students with other ways to obtain a standard diploma. Some of these recommendations are a direct result of our findings, and others are an amalgamation of our findings and suggestions from other studies. They fall back on the assumption that the standard diploma is an important property right, and that an alternative route to this property right should uphold the same principles that the standard route itself holds. With this as a backdrop, we make six recommendations:

1. States with alternative routes to their standard diplomas must provide clear, easy-to-find information about the alternative route.

There is a wide variation in the clarity and ease with which information on alternative routes can be found. While we would assume that students who fail graduation exams have access to

information about alternative routes through their schools and counselors, this is not always the case. Even if it is, it is important for information about alternative routes to a standard diploma to be publicly available. This allows a transparent understanding by the general public of the standard diploma and how students earn them, and ensures that other interested parties in a student’s academic career (such as parents, grandparents, guardians, and others) also have access to information about alternative routes that may not make it home from the school. When we started our search for information on alternative routes in late 2003, there were states in which it was extremely difficult to find information about alternative routes—even though we had seen them discussed by state officials in news articles. This changed over time. As we completed our verification process and revisited Web sites, we found that some had improved dramatically in terms of both the ease of finding information and the clarity of information once found. It is our belief that if an alternative route to a standard diploma is available in a state, information about it should be clear and easy for all to access. All critical details, such as whether the alternative requires students to meet the same standards as the regular route, should be stated in clear and explicit terms.

2. The alternative route must be based on the same beliefs and premises as the standard route to the diploma.

When states set up the requirements for their standard diploma they typically have conversations about the meaning of the diploma. These discussions generally involve what it means to be an educated citizen and what businesses and post-secondary institutions should be able to expect of those who receive a diploma from high schools. If an alternative route has the same end point—the standard diploma—it is important to ensure that it is based on the same beliefs and premises. In other words, there should be an assumption that the alternative route is another way to demonstrate knowledge and skills that are considered comparable to those measured when students obtain a standard diploma through the standard route.

It is clear from our analysis of the alternative routes that this is not true for all of the alternative routes that are currently available to students. It is true more often for those routes that are available to all students than it is for the routes that are available only for students with disabilities. Many states seem to believe that these students need to be excused from showing the same knowledge and skills to obtain the same diploma as other students obtain. In our study we did not specifically look for evidence that there was some indication provided that the students had obtained a standard diploma through a non-comparable alternative route. We know that Minnesota is a state that does indicate on student records when the diploma was obtained through a non-comparable alternative route (“passed—individual” rather than “passed—state”). Whether other states do this is unknown; there was no obvious indication of such on their Web sites.

3. The same route or routes should be available to all students.

There is no clear rationale for having an alternative route to the standard diploma that is different

for students with disabilities. When states have had different routes for students with disabilities, it generally has been a non-comparable route. If it is assumed that this is not desired, as we have done here, then all other needs of students with disabilities should be addressed through the provision of accommodations and universally designed assessments (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002; Thompson & Thurlow, 2002; Thompson, Thurlow, & Malouf, 2004). If there are particular concerns about students with disabilities because of a historical lack of access to the curriculum and standards, then a phase-in approach to graduation exams for students with disabilities (as was implemented by New York) may be most appropriate.

4. The alternative route should truly be an alternative to the graduation exam, not just another test.

It is important to lay out the assumptions behind the alternative route that is available to students. Those alternative routes that are simply other tests often are based on the assumption that students are already taking many assessments and have demonstrated their knowledge and skills through those assessments. States tend to indicate that as long as the assessments are of equivalent difficulty, they can substitute for the state tests. This argument does not necessarily address the link to state standards.

We believe that alternative routes to the standard diploma really have a unique function to play. They are needed for those students who truly are not able to show their knowledge and skills on a paper and pencil test, but who have indeed met the standards. Thus, for these students, another way of demonstrating their knowledge and skills is needed—not just a paper and pencil test. A number of states have recognized this need and have developed alternative routes that include portfolios, special curricula, and review panels.

5. The alternative route should reflect a reasoned and reasonable process.

The alternative route is made up of a number of decisions, each of which affects whether the process is reasonable, and has potential intended and unintended consequences. Involving stakeholders in the development of alternative routes, or at least in identifying the foundational beliefs and assumptions underlying the routes, should be part of the development process.

There is evidence that this is occurring with the alternative routes that we studied here, even though we did not talk directly with those who developed the alternative routes. For example, in the Massachusetts *Performance Appeals*, we saw evidence of a change that took place in January of 2004. In Florida, we saw that a policy that was implemented for one year was extended to a second year.

6. Procedures should be implemented to evaluate the technical adequacy of the alternative route and to track its consequences.

Just as the technical adequacy of regular assessments is important, so is the technical adequacy of alternative assessment routes, whatever their form. This is not as much a challenge when the

alternative route is another test (although, of course, there still needs to be a demonstration of alignment to state standards) as it is when the alternative route is a different format, such as a portfolio or a panel review.

The importance of examining the consequences of the alternative route takes on just as much importance as examining the consequences of the regular graduation exam. There needs to be systematic tracking of the consequences of the alternative routes. How many students participate in the alternative route to the standard diploma? Are there too many for the system to handle? Does the alternative route increase the graduation rate or the dropout rate of students in general or of certain subgroups of students? These and other questions about consequences that stakeholders identify as important should be pursued.

Conclusion

Our study of alternative routes to a standard diploma has been challenging. The search was difficult, the verification tedious, and the cross-checking complex. In a previous analysis, Thurlow and Esler (2000) examined appeals processes for students with disabilities who failed graduation exams, a relatively restricted search. But we know now that there are many other options available—students do not necessarily have to fail the exam first, nor do they necessarily have to be on an IEP or have a 504 plan to use an alternative route. Knowing the many other options and the details and complexities probably made our search more challenging. We believe it resulted in more accurate information. Still, there is more research that needs to be done. Our broad analysis of comparability needs to be taken a step further. While public declarations of comparability are important, it is just as important to conduct an analysis of the alternative routes to determine their comparability. This analysis might include difficulty analyses and alignment to standards studies for other tests and portfolios, analyses of the content of courses of study, and other procedures as appropriate.

It is good that many of the states that have graduation exams have determined that they need to have an alternative route for students to obtain the standard diploma. Making this information more widely available in a clear and easy to understand format should be a goal for all states. Even if information about alternative routes is available in high schools, some state department of education staff had difficulty verifying the information, a sign that it is not common knowledge. The more public and transparent the information is, the better.

We think that states may also want to re-examine their decisions to allow students with disabilities to earn standard diplomas through alternative routes that are not comparable to standard routes to the diploma. In an era where high expectations have been targeted for all students, and the achievement of grade-level proficiency is expected of all but a small percentage of students

with disabilities, states may be reinforcing the perception that students with disabilities cannot meet standards. The perpetuation of the myth that students with disabilities should be excluded from these high expectations of basic skills is disconcerting.

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Appendix A

State Profiles

Alaska

The **Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE)** is a test designed to provide information on whether students meet the essential competencies provided in the standards that have been set by the state. Beginning in 2004, high school students were required to pass the HSGQE to earn a high school diploma. The test covers reading, writing, and mathematics. Each content area contains multiple-choice questions with four possible answer choices. The multiple choice questions are machine scored. In addition to the multiple-choice questions, there are constructed-response questions which require students to demonstrate their skills in more complex levels of thinking. These are scored by professional staff experienced in providing reliable and consistent hand-scoring. All constructed-response questions allow for full or partial credit.

Information about Alternative Routes in Alaska

The following table provides an overview of the **two alternative routes** that have been created in Alaska—one for all students (high school seniors) and one for students with IEPs and 504 plans. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Waiver from High School Graduation Qualifying Examination	High school seniors	Student, or student's parent or legal guardian	Panel of three members appointed by commissioner	A student may receive a waiver from the HSGQE if he or she arrives in Alaska with two or fewer semesters remaining in the year of intended graduation. Or, a student has a "rare and unusual circumstance" which consists only of: 1. the death of the student's parent(s) if the death occurs within the last semester of the student's year of intended graduation; 2. a serious and sudden illness or physical injury that prevents the student from taking the HSGQE; 3. a disability arising in the student's high school career and the disability arises too late to develop a meaningful and valid alternative assessment (request for a waiver may only be granted if the waiver is consistent with IEP); or 4. a significant and uncorrectable system error. Or, a student has passed another state's competency examination.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Optional Assessment (OA)	Students with disabilities served under an IEP or Section 504 Plan	IEP or Section 504 team recommends	Department of Education reviews application and if procedures have been followed, the OA is approved	To participate in the OA a student with disabilities must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have attempted to pass all sections of the HSGQE with or without accommodations • be recommended by an IEP or Section 504 team • have approval in writing from the Dept. of Education and Early Development prior to taking the OA • have a copy of the IEP or Section 504 plan included in the application • only take the OA for the content areas for which the student received a “below” or “not proficient” score

Waiver from HSGQE

A waiver from the HSGQE may be requested for several reasons, including recent arrival in the state, rare and unusual circumstances, or passing another state’s competency exam. If this waiver request is denied, a student or student’s parent or legal guardian may appeal the denial by filing a form provided by the governing body, and prescribed by the department. It must be postmarked no later than 30 days after the notice of denial was received.

The request must state the grounds for appeal, including a brief summary of the nature of the original waiver request, and a statement explaining why the governing body was wrong to deny the waiver. The appeal is reviewed by a panel of three members appointed by the commissioner. A panel may deliberate in person, through correspondence, by telephone, audio or video teleconference, or by other electronic means, and will submit a recommended decision to the commissioner after it has deliberated on the record. The commissioner notifies the student and the governing body of the commissioner’s decision.

Optional Assessment

For students with disabilities in Alaska who have been unable to pass all or some of the content areas of the HSGQE, changes are made to the administration of the HSGQE, but not to the content or format. These are referred to as **Optional Assessments**. There are five requirements for the administration of an Optional Assessment:

- Student must have attempted to pass all sections of the HSGQE with or without accommodations before being eligible.
- Optional assessments must be recommended by an IEP or Section 504 team.

- Approval in writing by the Dept. of Education and Early Development must be received prior to administration of the Optional Assessment.
- A copy of the IEP or Section 504 plan must be included in the application.
- The student may only take the optional assessment for the content areas for which the student received a “below” or “not proficient” score.

Samples of acceptable optional assessments include:

- Allow a student with a specific learning disability in mathematics to use a four-function calculator.
- Allow a student with a specific learning disability in reading, writing, and/or mathematics to ask a test proctor for clarification about a test question.
- Allow signer to interpret test questions for a deaf student.
- Allow use of a spell check on a word processor.
- Allow a student the use of a dictionary or thesaurus.

These accommodations are only acceptable if they are part of the optional assessment process and if the student meets the requirements for participation in this option. Other test modifications are not allowed in the optional assessment process. These disallowed modifications include: reading the HSGQE reading test to a student, helping a student find the correct answer to a question, allowing a student to take the HSGQE at home, using a grammar check on a word processor, and using a graphing calculator on the math test. IEP and Section 504 teams may still give students modifications, but the exams would be invalidated and the student would not be eligible for a high school diploma.

This information was obtained before the settlement of Disability Rights Advocates v. Alaska, which allows students with disabilities to use many accommodations that they could not use before, including oral presentations, spell-checkers, voice-recognition software, help from test proctors (see “News in Brief: A State Capitals Roundup,” 2004).

California

Beginning with the 2005–2006 school year, students must pass the **California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)**, and meet the district’s requirements for graduation, to receive a public high school diploma. The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts (ELA) and

mathematics. The first opportunity students have to take the CAHSEE is in either February or March of grade 10. Students who do not pass this administration have up to five additional opportunities to pass the CAHSEE, including one additional opportunity after the completion of grade 12. School districts must provide supplemental instruction to assist students who do not pass the exam.

The CAHSEE was offered for the first time in the spring of 2001 as an option to volunteer 9th graders (class of 2004). In July 2003 the State Board of Education took action to move the passage of the CAHSEE as a diploma requirement to the Class of 2006. The Class of 2006 took the CAHSEE for the first time as 10th graders in February 2004.

Information about Alternative Route in California

The following table provides an overview of the **one alternative route** that has been created in California. It is for students with disabilities.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Waiver	Students with IEP or Section 504 plan	Parent or guardian	Local Board of Education	Student with IEP or Section 504 plan who takes CAHSEE with a modification determined to fundamentally alter what the test measures and receives the equivalent of a passing score (350 or higher) may request waiver of the requirement to successfully pass that section of CAHSEE

Waiver

The California legislature (SB 964 - Burton) required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop, and the State Board of Education to approve, by January 31, 2004, a request for a proposal for an independent consultant to assess options and provide recommendations for alternatives to the high school exit examination for pupils with disabilities to be eligible for a high school diploma. The bill required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to establish an advisory panel, composed of members with prescribed qualifications for the purpose of advising the independent consultant. The independent consultant would provide the advisory panel with a preliminary report, and subsequently prepare and disseminate a final report by May 1, 2005.

Students with an IEP or a Section 504 plan who take a section of the CAHSEE using a modification determined to fundamentally alter what the test measures, and who receive a score of 350 or higher, will have their score report marked “not valid” because the modification changes what is being assessed. However, at a parent’s or guardian’s request, the school principal must submit a **waiver request** of the requirement to successfully pass one or both sections of the CAHSEE to the local school district governing board.

Florida

The **Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)** is designed to assess the achievement of the higher-order cognitive skills represented in the *Sunshine State Standards (SSS)* in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The SSS portion of FCAT is a criterion-referenced test. A secondary purpose is to compare the performance of Florida students to the reading and mathematics performance of students across the nation using a norm-referenced test (NRT).

In August of 2001, the State Board of Education established the FCAT passing scores students will have to earn as one of the requirements for receiving a regular high school diploma. For the class of 2002–2003, the passing scores were 287 in reading and 295 in mathematics. Students who graduated from high school in the 2003–2004 school year and thereafter must earn passing scores of 300 on the grade 10 FCAT. Tenth grade students will have multiple opportunities to earn passing scores.

Information about Alternative Routes in Florida

The following table provides an overview of **three alternative routes** that have been created in Florida—one for all students (12th graders) and two for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Alternative Test	12th graders	School guidance counselors	State commissioner has power to authorize alternative test	Other standardized tests, such as SAT and ACT college entrance exams can count as comparable to passing scores on the FCAT.
Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Waiver	Students with disabilities	IEP team	IEP team	Legislation provides for waiver of the Grade 10 FCAT for students with disabilities whose abilities cannot be accurately measured by the FCAT.
Special Exemption	Students with disabilities	Superintendent of schools	Commissioner of Education	Exemption under extraordinary circumstances that would cause the test to reflect student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills rather than the student's achievement. Note: Students who are granted an exemption must meet all other criteria for graduation with a standard diploma.

Alternative Test

The 2003 Florida Legislature made provisions for the Commissioner of Education to determine the comparable validity of other available standardized tests such as the SAT, ACT, PSAT, PLAN and tests used for entry into the military. Legislation provided that if such tests were deemed to be valid and reliable measures, the commissioner was directed to approve the use of such tests as **alternative tests** to the grade 10 FCAT for the 2002–2003 school year. Students who received scores equated to the passing score on the 10th grade FCAT would be considered to have met the assessment requirement for a standard high school diploma. The legislature debated this issue again in the 2004 session, and provided for the alternative test option for another year (House Bill 23B).

Waiver

The Enhanced New Needed Opportunity for Better Life and Education for Students with Disabilities (ENNOBLES) legislation also provides for a **waiver** of the FCAT for students with disabilities whose abilities can not be measured by the FCAT, even with accommodations.

Special Exemption

There is also a provision for a **special exemption** in extraordinary circumstances for students with disabilities whose sensory, manual, or speaking disabilities prevent them from demonstrating their competencies on the FCAT. These students must meet all other criteria for graduation if they want to receive a standard diploma.

Georgia

There are currently two assessments required to earn a regular Georgia high school diploma. They are the **Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT)** and the **Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT)**. The GHSGT became a graduation test requirement in 1994. The subjects tested are English/language arts, writing, math, social studies, and science. The law requires that the GHSGT “include process and application skills as assessed in a range of academic content, and shall exceed minimum and essential skills by extending the assessments’ range of difficulty.” The students are tested initially in the spring of their 11th grade year and there is no limit to the number of times a student may retake the graduation assessment until passing the criteria. The GHSWT is a performance-based writing assessment that is taken for the first time in the fall of the student’s 11th grade year. There are no limits as to the number of times a student may retake this assessment until passing these criteria.

Information about Alternative Route in Georgia

The following table provides an overview of the **one alternative route** that Georgia has created for all students. This is described more generally following the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Waiver/variance	All students	Student, parent(s), guardian files request with local school superintendent	State Superintendent of Schools	Request for waiver/variance must include a statement of what will be accomplished in lieu of requirements, reason for request, and permission for student's records to be reviewed

Waiver/Variance

Requests for **waiver or variance** of a high school graduation test must be filed with the local school superintendent by the student, parent(s), or guardian. The request shall specify the following: the rule(s) and requirement(s) being waived or varied, including the specific provisions and wording; the specific facts that would justify a variance or waiver for the student; what will be accomplished in lieu of the rule requirement(s); the reason why the variance or waiver requested would serve the purpose of the underlying requirement; and permission for department staff to receive all records—including special education—pertinent to the request.

Once the local school superintendent receives a request for waiver/variance, the superintendent must submit within three weeks the following information to the state superintendent of schools:

- School records, including official student transcript.
- Current schedule/status of the student.
- The student's program of study, high school attendance records, and high school graduation test reports.
- Plans of accommodations made for the student in the instructional program, including minutes of student support team meeting(s) and other action plans, if any.
- Special education records (where applicable), including evaluation reports, eligibility reports, legible individual education plans, classroom modifications that have been implemented, test administration addenda and strategies.
- A statement giving the number of attempts the student has made to pass the test(s) for which the waiver or variance is requested, including an explanation of extenuating circumstances known to the school if the student did not take advantage of each testing opportunity.
- If applicable, accommodations made with regard to the test(s) in question.
- A statement describing any extraordinary opportunities provided by the school to assist

the student in preparing for the test(s), including remediation classes, tutoring sessions, etc., and the participation of the student in such activities (student or parent may have additional information).

- A statement setting forth the superintendent’s or local board of education’s position with respect to the request; and any other relevant information, including a copy of the request from the student, parent(s), or legal guardian.

Indiana

(Information not verified by state)

The **Graduation Qualifying Exam** is a standards-based exam in English/language arts and mathematics that is administered in September and March of Grade 10. The exam consists of 57 mathematics questions and 79 English/language arts questions. Test items are structured in a multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay question format. The mathematics section is 162 minutes long and the English/language arts section is 203 minutes long. All students are allowed to use calculators on the mathematics section. A student receives a single score in each subject area that reflects the student’s knowledge of basic skills and the student’s ability to apply those skills to the tasks the student will face after high school. Diplomas were first withheld from students who did not pass the exam in 1999–2000. Initially, there were two levels of achievement on the graduation exam: “pass” and “did not pass.” Beginning in 2004, there were three levels: “pass+,” “pass,” and “did not pass.” The passing score for the English/language arts exam is 466 on a scale of 300–800, the passing score for the mathematics exam is 486 on a scale of 300–720. Students have four opportunities to retest by the end of Grade 12 if they fail the Graduation Qualifying Exam the first time.

Information about Alternative Routes in Indiana

The following table provides an overview of the **three alternative routes** that have been created in Indiana—two for all students and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
CORE 40	All students	No information	No information	Student successfully completes academically challenging courses in English, mathematics, science, and social studies, and earns at least a C in all required and elective courses.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Appeal Test Results	All students	No information	No information	Student meets State Board criteria (takes exam in each subject area; completes all remediation opportunities; minimum attendance of 95%; minimum C average in courses required for graduation), plus must obtain written recommendation from teacher in subject area(s) where did not get passing score on Graduation Qualifying Exam, and principal must agree with recommendation, with documentation provided to ensure student has attained the academic standard based on other tests or classroom work. Student must satisfy all other state and local graduation requirements.
Waiver	Students with IEP or 504 plan	Student's teacher with the principal's authorization	Student's case conference committee	Student's case conference committee recommends that requirements be waived and demonstrates that student has attained the academic standard. Student must meet specific criteria, including retaking exam in subject areas which he or she did not pass, as often as required by IEP, completes remediation, maintains school attendance of 95%, maintains C average or equivalent, satisfies all other state and local graduation requirements.

Core 40

An alternative way Indiana students can graduate is successful completion of the **Core 40 curriculum**. Core 40 is a single, flexible high school curriculum that, except for elective courses, consists of academically challenging courses in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. A student's principal must certify within one month of the student's graduation date that the student has successfully completed all the Core 40 requirements. In order to complete all Core 40 components and obtain a waiver of the requirement to meet the educational proficiency standard tested in the Graduation Qualifying Exam, a student must have a "C" in all required and elective courses.

Appeal Test Results

A student who does not achieve a passing score on the Graduation Qualifying Exam and who does not meet the requirements of Core 40 may graduate by successfully **appealing the student's test results** under criteria adopted by the State Board. The student may be eligible for the appeal process if all of the following have occurred:

- The student must have taken the graduation exam in each subject area.
- The student must have completed all remediation opportunities provided by the school.

- The student must have maintained a minimum attendance rate of 95 percent with excused absences not counting toward the student’s record of attendance.
- The student must have maintained at least a “C” average or the equivalent in all courses required for graduation.
- The student must obtain a written recommendation from the student’s teacher in each subject area, in which the student has not achieved a passing score. The principal of the student’s school must concur with the recommendation, and documentation must be provided to ensure that the student has attained the academic standard in the subject area based upon:
 - tests other than the graduation exam; or
 - classroom work.
- The student must otherwise satisfy all state and local graduation requirements.

Waiver

If a student with an IEP or section 504 plan does not pass the Graduation Qualifying Exam, that student may receive a **waiver** under certain circumstances. The student’s case conference committee may determine that the student is eligible to graduate if the case conference committee finds the following:

- The student’s teacher of record, in consultation with a teacher in each content area in which the student has not achieved a passing score, makes a written recommendation to the case conference committee. The school principal must concur with the recommendation, and it must be supported by documentation that the student has attained the academic standard in the subject area based on tests other than the Graduation Qualifying Exam or classroom work.
- The student meets all of the following requirements:
 - The student retakes the graduation examination in each subject area in which student did not achieve a passing score, as often as required by the student’s individualized program;
 - The student completes remediation opportunities provided by the student’s school;
 - The student maintains a school attendance rate of 95 percent with excused absences not counting toward the student’s record of attendance;

- The student maintains at least a “C” average or the equivalent in all courses required for graduation; and
- The student otherwise satisfies all state and local graduation requirements.

Massachusetts

The **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)** has been administered since 1998. It is a standards-based exam that is aligned to state standards. MCAS became a state graduation requirement for grade 10 students in 2001, and diplomas were withheld for the first time in 2003. In order to earn a Massachusetts diploma, students must pass grade 10 MCAS tests (or subsequent Retests, given twice each year after grade 10) in English/language arts and mathematics. This customized test includes multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The math test is 180 minutes (divided into 60 minute sessions), and the English/language arts section is a total of 225 minutes (divided into 45 minute sessions). Students may have additional time if necessary, and all students are allowed to use calculators on some portions of the math test. English language learners (ELLs) may use an approved bilingual word-to-word dictionary on all MCAS tests and are required to pass these tests, like other students, in order to receive a diploma. Students with disabilities must also meet the same standard in order to graduate, and receive the same high school diploma as other students when they do meet these requirements. Students who meet local graduation requirements, but do *not* pass both MCAS tests, may receive a state-endorsed Certificate of Attainment.

Information about Alternative Routes in Massachusetts

The following table provides an overview of the **MCAS Performance Appeals** process that has been created for students who have failed the grade 10 test, or retest, three times. It is described more generally in the text following the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
MCAS Performance Appeals	High school seniors	Anyone; a parent, guardian, educator may request an appeal, but only the superintendent of schools or designee, or the director of an approved private special education school or collaborative may file an appeal.	Appeals Review Panel	Student must have 95% attendance rate; must have taken the MCAS test(s) three times; must have scored 216 or 218 at least once, and must have participated in MCAS tutoring or other academic support. As of January 2004, students with disabilities who meet the other criteria are no longer required to score 216 on the test to be eligible to appeal.

Performance Appeal

To be eligible for an **MCAS Performance Appeal**, a student must have:

- Attended school 95% of the time (in 2004), or met the school district's attendance standard (before 2004);
- Taken the MCAS test(s) three times;
- Scored 216 or 218 at least once; and
- Participated in MCAS tutoring or other academic help that is available.

Massachusetts fully funds the remediation costs for students who do not pass the MCAS. School districts are required to provide academic support services for students who fail MCAS, but students are not required to attend. ELLs who meet eligibility requirements may also apply for performance appeals. Any of the eligibility rules may be waived by the Commissioner of Education for good cause. For example, the attendance requirement may be waived if the student has been absent due to serious illness.

In addition to meeting criteria for the appeal, a student must then meet the performance requirement. The student's academic work in school must meet or exceed a performance level equivalent to the 220 passing score on the grade 10 English and/or math test. There are two ways the school can demonstrate that a student meets this level of performance:

- Compare the student's grade point averages in English or math with the GPAs of other classmates who passed the MCAS (with scores between 220- 228) and who took the same series of courses as the student under appeal. If the student's GPA is at or above the classmates' GPA (or within the statistical margin of error), then the appeal will be granted.
- If the school doesn't have at least six other students who took the same sequence of courses and passed the MCAS, then the superintendent may submit a portfolio of the student's actual work. The portfolio will be reviewed by a team of highly trained English and math teachers who will determine whether the student meets the standard.

A parent, guardian, or educator may request an appeal on behalf of a student, but only the superintendent of schools or designee, or the director of an approved private special education school or collaborative, may actually file an appeal. The superintendent may initiate an appeal for an eligible student with a disability with the consent of the parent (or student who is 18 or older). If a parent of a student with a disability, (or a student with a disability over 18) requests an appeal, the district must comply by submitting one.

An appeal may be filed any time after the student has taken the MCAS grade 10 test in the appealed area at least three times. Appeals may be filed at any time during the year and are reviewed on an ongoing basis. The Department of Education reviews the appeal documentation to ensure it meets the eligibility requirements, and then refers the appeal to the MCAS Performance Appeals Board. The Board makes a recommendation to the Commissioner, and the Commissioner notifies the superintendent of the final decision. The superintendent may make a request for reconsideration, and must notify the parent of the finding of their child's appeal.

In January, 2004, changes were made to the appeals process for students with disabilities, as follows:

- Students with disabilities are no longer required to attain a minimum score of 216 on the grade 10 MCAS in order to be eligible for an appeal.
- A parent of a student with a disability (or student with a disability over 18) may request an appeal, and the district must comply by submitting one.
- Parents must give consent to the appeal, if it was not requested by them.
- Parents must be notified by the district of appeals findings for their child.

For students with significant disabilities, there is also an option to take the MCAS Alternate Assessment—(MCAS-ALT) in a portfolio format—if the student is unable to take the test either with or without accommodations. The MCAS-Alt portfolio provides an additional format through which the student can demonstrate that he or she meets the performance level required by the state to graduate. Students who take alternate assessments and who meet eligibility requirements may also be considered for a performance appeal through an appeals portfolio.

Minnesota

Minnesota has been administering the **Basic Skills Test (BST)** in reading and mathematics since 1996 and in writing since 1998. Prior to 1998, districts could substitute a norm-referenced test for the BST. In 1998, the state removed that alternative and all districts were required to administer the state test. The reading and mathematics tests are administered in Grade 8 and the writing test in Grade 10. Diplomas were withheld for the first time in 2000. The BST consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subsections. Since 1996, students were required to complete estimation questions without the aid of a calculator. Starting in 2004, students must demonstrate basic computation skills in estimation and computation without the aid of a calculator in one section of the math test (MN Session Laws 2001, 1st Special Session, Chapter 6, Article 2, Section 67). The passing score on

the BST is 75% or 600 for the top reading score of 750 and the top mathematics score of 780. In writing, the holistic passing score is 3 on a scale of 0–6.

Information about Alternative Routes in Minnesota

The following table provides an overview of the **two alternative routes** that have been created in Minnesota—one for all students and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text following the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
No name	All students	Student, parent, or school district	Decided by the district	There are no “official” alternative routes at the state level, but districts may permit general education students to take the tests with accommodations as a “last chance” option
No name	Students with disabilities or 504 plan	No information	IEP team	For students with disabilities, the test may be modified or scores may be lowered

Route for All Students

If students do not pass the reading or mathematics BST on the first administration, they are allowed 11 opportunities to retake the exam by the end of 12th grade. There are six retake opportunities for writing. The state allows students who have been in the United States fewer than three years prior to graduation to be exempted from the BSTs. Minnesota has a long tradition of “local control” in education policy, which is evident in the graduation exam policies adopted by the state. There is no official state-approved alternative route for “all students.” However, individual districts may allow general education students after February of their senior year to take the BST with accommodations, even if the student does not typically use accommodations for instruction. We did not find any information on the Web site about alternative routes to a standard diploma for general education students. However, when the state “verified” the information we reported, it indicated that **districts** may permit general education students to take the tests with accommodations as a “last chance” option, and provided the link to verify: http://education.state.mn.us/html/intro_testing_resources.htm.

Route for Students with Disabilities or 504 Plans

Students with IEPs and 504 plans are required to participate in the diploma tests. These students are allowed to use testing accommodations in the areas of setting, scheduling, presentation, writing and response. Students may also have the test modified to meet the specifications of the plan. Exemptions and **individual passing scores** are based on the student’s IEP or 504 plan and the recommendations of the IEP team. If the required passing scores are lowered, the state identifies this modification as a “Pass—Individual.” Special education students with severe developmental cognitive delays may be exempted from the BSTs based on the judgment of the IEP team.

Mississippi

Mississippi is phasing in the use of course-based tests for graduation standards called the **Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)**, in place of the previous more general Functional Literacy Exam (FLE). The end-of-course tests are aligned with course content. Students with anticipated graduation in 2003 were required to pass the FLE. Students with anticipated graduation in 2004 had to pass the math section of the FLE plus the subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877 and English II. Students with anticipated graduation in 2005 must pass the math section of FLE plus subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II and Biology I. Students with anticipated graduation in 2006 must pass subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II, Biology I, and Algebra I. Students take the exams the year they complete the coursework. The year 2003 was the first year diplomas were withheld. The state plans to use the Algebra I and English II tests to meet the requirements of NCLB.

In addition to the paper-and-pencil administrations of the subject area tests, two on-line (computer-based) test administrations of the Algebra I, Biology, English II Multiple-Choice, and U.S. History tests became available in 2003–04 for students who previously failed those tests. The online test administrations are offered in October and March, and feature score reporting within two weeks of the administration of the test. Initially the on-line test administrations were limited to students scheduled to graduate in 2003–04 or 2004–05 (11th and 12th grade students in 2003–04). However, the Department of Education now allows all students to participate in the on-line testing. With the paper-and-pencil and on-line test administrations, students could have up to five opportunities to be retested during the year. Districts must administer all three paper-and-pencil test administrations at a minimum, so that all students have at least three opportunities to re-test.

Information about Alternative Route in Mississippi

The following table provides an overview of the **one alternative route** that Mississippi has created for all students. General information about it is presented after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Appeals/ substitute evaluation	All students	Student, parent, or district personnel	State Appeals of Substitute Evaluation Committee	When a student, parent, or district personnel has reason to believe a student has mastered the subject area curriculum, but was unable for two separate administrations to demonstrate mastery on the statewide SATP. The student has passed the course but failed the SATP.

Appeals/Substitute Evaluation

If a student does not pass the SATP, the student, parent, or district personnel may submit a written statement with supporting evidence indicating the student has mastered the subject area

curriculum and outlining reasons the student might be successful with a substitute evaluation. The initial **appeal** is submitted at the local level for determination of merit. A local decision is made to forward the appeal to the state level to the State Appeals of Substitute Evaluation Committee for consideration or to deny the appeal. If the appeal is denied at the local level, the appeal can be submitted directly to the state level for consideration. Direct appeals and appeals forwarded from the local level are considered at the state level, and a decision is made to grant the appeal or to deny it.

If the appeal is granted, the Mississippi Department of Education will assess the substitute evaluation to determine whether the student demonstrates mastery of the subject area curriculum. If the results of the **substitute evaluation** determine that the student has demonstrated mastery of the curriculum, a passing score will be substituted for a failing score on the standard statewide SATP, and the Mississippi Department of Education will bear the cost associated with the substitute evaluation. If the results of the substitute evaluation do not determine that the student has demonstrated mastery of the curriculum, the student must continue participating in subsequent standard statewide testing. The costs associated with the administration and scoring of the substitute evaluation will be borne by the school district in which the student took the test in question.

New Jersey

The **High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)** is a state test given to students in the 11th grade to measure whether they have gained the knowledge and skills identified in the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Students who entered grade 11 on or after September 1, 2001, must pass the HSPA as a graduation requirement. The test is given to all first-time eleventh-grade students in March over a three-day period. The multiple-choice questions are machine-scored. Students must receive a passing score (200) on each section of the HSPA, where scores range from 100 to 300. Students who fail any section of the HSPA in March of the 11th grade year, have two more opportunities in the senior year to take any failed section of the test again. In addition, these students must be given a comprehensive assessment and must be provided with supplemental remedial instruction targeted to their individual needs.

Information about Alternative Routes in New Jersey

The following table provides an overview of the **two alternative routes** that have been created in New Jersey—one for all students and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
SRA	All students	Local district staff review the Individual Student Reports to see whether the student has demonstrated proficiency on the language arts literacy or the mathematics section of the HSPA. A student must have a partially proficient score in a HSPA content to take the SRA.	The SRA Performance Assessment Tests (PATs) are scored by item-specific rubrics. If two SRA panel members' scores disagree by more than one point, a third content-certified panel member must score the response. The new PAT score is derived by taking the mean of (for reading or math) or summing (for writing) the two highest contiguous scores. If no two of the three scores are in agreement, the student must complete another PAT.	The SRA is an individually, locally administered, state-developed assessment. Each SRA question, known as a Performance Assessment Task (PAT) is aligned to the HSPA content specifications by clusters. A partially proficient score in a HSPA content area qualifies the student for the SRA. However, before the student can take the SRA PATs, the student must participate in a school-designed SRA instructional program for that content area. Students may take a SRA PAT once. If a student is not successful on a specific PAT, additional PATs may be administered until the student successfully completes the required number of PATs.
IEP Exemption	Students with disabilities	IEP team	IEP team	Students must take the HSPA at least once in each content area before qualifying for exemption.

Special Review Assessment

The **Special Review Assessment (SRA)** process is a designated alternative assessment for the HSPA. The SRA provides students the opportunity to show their proficiency of the HSPA knowledge and skills in a familiar setting. It is aligned to the HSPA test specifications to ensure that students who demonstrate proficiency through the SRA have shown they have the same knowledge, skills, and performance levels as students who demonstrate proficiency through the HSPA itself. The process used for the development of the SRA is designed to ensure that the SRA is fair, reliable, and comparable for all eligible SRA candidates, including students from special populations. English Language Learners (ELLs) may demonstrate proficiency in required HSPA areas through completion of the SRA process in their native language, and/or in English with appropriate accommodations. If ELLs take SRA Performance Assessment Tests (PATs) in their native language, then they must also meet the English fluency standard of 530 on the Maculatis (MAC) II.

All SRA students must continue to take the HSPA each time it is administered, including March of their senior year. SRA candidates meet the graduation assessment requirement only when the district receives written approval from the county superintendent. The decision on whether or

not a student graduates is made by the local school district, pursuant to law and rule. The district superintendent and high school principal are required to verify that each student’s performance on the SRA PAT meets or exceeds the proficiency level of the state’s graduation test.

A student whose scaled score is below 200 (partially proficient) in one or more HSPA content areas and is expected to complete all state and local graduation requirements in the 12th grade for a June graduation is eligible for the SRA process. Students who by the end of their senior year have not completed the SRA process nor scored proficient (200 or better) in all HSPA areas may continue with the SRA process as a regular, vocational, or alternative high school student or as an adult high school student.

IEP Exemption

If a student’s IEP states that the student must demonstrate proficiency in one or both HSPA content areas, and the student does not, then the student must participate in the SRA process. The IEP team may exempt the student from subsequent HSPA testing if taking the HSPA would be detrimental to the student. If the student’s IEP status states that the student is exempt from taking the HSPA or exempt from passing the HSPA, the student should not be placed in the SRA process, but rather would take the APA (Alternate Proficiency Assessment).

New Mexico

New Mexico began administering the **New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMH-SCE)** in 1987. The exam tests reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and composition in November and January of the 10th grade. There are about 30 questions for each section except for composition, which has only one. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, writing/prompt, and extended/performance questions. There is no time limit for completing the test sections, but students generally take an hour to complete them.

Information about Alternative Routes in New Mexico

The following table provides an overview of the **two alternative routes** that have been created in New Mexico—one for all students and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Waiver	All students	District Superintendent	State Secretary of Education	The local school board must approve the waiver and submit documentation of attainment of competencies

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Graduation pathways (standard pathway, career readiness pathway, and ability pathway)	Students with IEP (504 plans can also be considered, but do not fall under IDEA protections)	IEP team can propose a change to the pathway. The Public Education Department expects that teams first consider the standard pathway, then the career readiness pathway, then the ability pathway in order to garner a standard diploma.	IEP team	Each pathway has specific criteria for students who do not achieve a passing score on the graduation examination

Waiver

Any student may request a **waiver** to New Mexico’s exit exam. However, the local school board must approve the waiver and the superintendent is also required to submit documentation of attainment of competencies through other standardized assessment measures.

Pathways

In 1977, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) created the IEP Graduation Task Force that addressed three issues concerning the diploma: integrity, consistency, and accountability. The Task Force aimed at bringing consistency to graduation requirements and procedures across all schools and agencies under the authority of the State Board of Education (SBE) to protect all students, including students with disabilities. The Task Force established the **pathways to the diploma**—planned programs of study (courses, IEP goals, objectives, and benchmarks) designed to address the needs of individual students (New Mexico Department of Education, 2003). In November 1998, the SBE approved the new state regulations with regard to IEP graduation and revised those regulations in November 2002. In April 2003, New Mexico legislators revised graduation requirements for all students.

According to the graduation requirements, the IEP team plays an important role in the IEP graduation process. Based on the student’s needs and the impact of the disability, the IEP team determines the most appropriate pathway for the student. The IEP team is also responsible for verifying that the student achieved all program goals and objectives leading to graduation. The following graduation pathways are available for student with disabilities: the standard pathway, the career readiness pathway, and the ability pathway. A certificate with a follow-up plan of action is another option for students with disabilities.

The **standard pathway** is a program based on meeting or surpassing all requirements for graduation as identified in the New Mexico Standards of Excellence, with or without reasonable modification of delivery and assessment methods. The IEP team selects required courses and electives based on the student’s post-school goals, interests, and needs. The student must pass all sections of the NMHSCE under standard administration or with state-approved accommodations. If the IEP team determines a pathway other than the standard pathway, the team must

provide relevant documentation to support its choice of an alternative pathway.

The **career readiness pathway** is a program based on meeting the SBE’s Career Readiness Standards with benchmarks as defined in the IEP, with or without reasonable modification of delivery and assessment methods. The student’s interests, career preferences, and needs determine selection of appropriate classes. The student must take the NMHSCE achieving a level of competency or targeted proficiency that is pre-determined by the IEP team.

The **ability pathway** is an individualized program based on meeting or surpassing IEP goals and objectives, with or without reasonable modification of delivery and assessment methods, referencing skill attainment at a student’s ability level, that may lead to meaningful employment. The IEP team designs the ability pathway to bridge the student’s needs with IEP goals, objectives, and benchmarks. Typically, IEP teams develop the ability pathway for students with severe cognitive and/or physical disabilities or students with severe mental health challenges. The student must take the NMHSCE, achieving a level of competency or targeted proficiency that is pre-determined by the IEP team, or the New Mexico Alternate Assessment if the student is determined by the IEP team as eligible according to the established participation criteria.

The certificate with a follow-up plan of action is used when a student has completed the high school portion of the student’s education, and is on track for graduation, but the student still has transition needs that must be addressed by school staff and adult service providers working together. A student may earn a certificate that entitles him or her to participate in graduation activities and continue toward obtaining the high school diploma based on a plan to implement transition services. The certificate does not end a student’s right to a free and appropriate public education, but it allows for assistance with accessing adult services, seeking and maintaining employment, or pursuing post secondary training with support. If a student does not return to complete the follow-up plan of action, the district must count the student as a dropout. The student receives the diploma upon successful completion of IEP goals and transition outcomes.

New York

(Information not verified by state)

Regents Examinations are standards-based and end-of-course exams aligned to the graduation level of the New York State Learning Standards. In the late 1980s policymakers decided that standards in many New York schools were too low. Many students were tracked into low-level courses and received a poor education. At graduation, they received a local diploma by passing Regents Competency Tests which set standards at an 8th grade level. In response to these concerns, the Regents set higher standards in English, math, social studies, and science, and established a reliable, statewide way to measure those standards through the Regents exams. There are several course credit requirements for students in addition to scoring at least 65 on

the Regents exams in math, English, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and science. The tests, which consist of multiple choice, short answer, writing/prompt, and extended/performance task questions, are 180 minutes each, with the English test having two parts at 180 minutes each. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math sections of the exams. Open-ended assessment questions are scored by teachers. The levels are: pass with distinction (85–100), pass (65–84) and low pass (55–64). Students must score at least 65 to pass after 2005, but districts can choose to use the low pass score for students who entered grade 9 in 1999 and allow students to receive a local diploma.

Required Regents exams in subjects other than English are administered in five other languages. The New York State English as Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) administered in K–12 evaluates the English language proficiency of English language learners and is designed to ensure the success of students in exiting from bilingual/English as a second language programs to the general education English environment. Component retesting is available in English and math for students who have taken these exams twice without earning a passing score of 65 and who have earned a score between 48 and 64 on at least one of the two exams.

Information about Alternative Routes in New York

The following table provides an overview of the **two alternative routes** that have been created in New York—one for all students (high school seniors) and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text following the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Advanced Placement test, SAT II, International Baccalaureate test	High school seniors	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear
Regents Competency Test	Students with disabilities who fail the Regents exam	Unclear	Unclear	Option available until 2010

Alternative Assessments

Students have three opportunities each year to retake any required exam. They must pass all five by the end of 12th grade. The state has approved three **alternative assessments** that students can take in lieu of the Regents exams. They are Advanced Placements tests, the SAT II, and the International Baccalaureate.

Regents Competency Test

The safety net for students with disabilities allows students who fail the Regents exam to take and pass the **Regents Competency Test** to earn a local diploma and has been extended through the 2009–2010 school year. Students with disabilities can also receive an IEP Diploma, if they fail to achieve a regular diploma.

North Carolina

North Carolina started administering the **North Carolina High School Competency Test** in 1978. The graduation examination consists of the North Carolina High School Competency Tests of Reading Comprehension and Mathematics. In 2001, the Computer Skills Tests (multiple choice and performance section) was added as an additional graduation requirement administered in the 8th grade. Included in the tests are about 80 mathematics and 56–68 reading multiple choice questions. The Computer Skills Tests contain 70 computer skills multiple choice, and 23 computer skills performance questions. The mathematics section is designed for approximately 97 minutes and the reading section is designed for about 100 minutes, however students may use additional time if they need it. The computer skills multiple choice is designed for approximately 110 minutes and the performance test has a test administration time of about 133 minutes.

There are four proficiency levels in the North Carolina graduation testing system: Level I—lack sufficient mastery, Level II—demonstrate inconsistent mastery, Level III—consistently demonstrate mastery, and Level IV—consistently perform in a superior manner. Students must score at or above Level III on the examination. If students do not pass an examination section on the first administration, they are allowed a maximum of 13 opportunities to retake it by the end of Grade 12.

Information about Alternative Route in North Carolina

The following table provides an overview of the **one alternative route** that is available in North Carolina for students with disabilities. Additional information is provided after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Occupational course of study	Students with IEP	No information	No information	IEP team decision

Occupational Course of Study

There are four graduation courses of study approved by the North Carolina State Board of Education: career preparation, college technical preparation, college preparation, and occupational course of study. Some students with disabilities are enrolled in the occupational course of study, which includes 22 subject credits, school-based vocational training, work-based vocational training, competitive employment training, and a career portfolio. It started with the 9th grade class of 2000–01. No exit exam is required for students who are following the **occupational course of study**. Students with disabilities who are not pursuing the occupational course of study may apply in writing to be exempted from taking the North Carolina competency tests, although they will not be eligible for a high school diploma. Students with disabilities can also receive a certificate of achievement if they do not meet the requirements of a regular diploma.

Ohio

(Information not verified by state)

Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) were established by the Ohio General Assembly in 2001. Five tests for 10th graders in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies make up the OGT. They measure content learned through the end of 10th grade and are aligned to the new academic content standards. Students who begin 10th grade after July 1, 2004, must pass the new OGT. Prior to that the graduation tests were the Ninth Grade Proficiency Tests, which students had to pass in all five areas. This included the graduating classes of 2005 and 2006. Because the new OGT is also used for NCLB, sophomores taking the test in March 2004 are counted both for NCLB and as the first attempt for graduation. When the graduating class of 2007 takes the OGT, passing all five tests will be the graduation requirement. Students take the OGT for the first time in the spring of their sophomore year. They can continue to take the tests in fall and spring of their junior and senior years and during the summer. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer and essay/writing-prompt items. Students are allowed up to 150 minutes for each test, and can only take one test per day. Students are allowed to use calculators.

Information about Alternative Routes in Ohio

The following table provides information about the **two alternative routes** that have been created in Ohio—one for all students and one for students with IEPs. Additional information on these alternatives is provided in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Appeal	All students	Unclear	Unclear	Student must pass 4 of the 5 tests, have 97% attendance rate, 2.5 GPA, complete curriculum requirements, participate in intervention programs with 97% attendance, and have letters recommending graduation from high school principal and each high school teacher in subject area not yet passed.
Waiver	Students with IEP	Unclear	Unclear	Students whose IEP excuses them from the consequence of having to pass the OGT may be awarded a diploma.

Appeals Process

Students may **appeal** to graduate and receive a diploma without passing all five tests of the Ohio Graduation Test if they meet the following requirements:

- Pass four of the five tests and have missed passing the fifth test by no more than 10 points;
- Have had a 97 percent attendance rate through all four years of high school and must not have had an expulsion in high school;

- Have a grade point average of 2.5 out of 4.0 in the subject area missed and have completed the curriculum requirement in the subject area missed;
- Have participated in any intervention programs offered by the school and must have had a 97 percent attendance rate in any program offered outside the normal school day;
- Obtain letters of recommendation from each teacher in the subject area not yet passed.

Waiver

Students whose IEP excuses them from the consequence of having to pass the OGT may be awarded a diploma by a **waiver**. Students with disabilities who pass the test using accommodations will also receive a diploma. However, federal law requires every student to take the OGT or an alternate assessment.

Oregon

(Information not verified by state)

The Oregon Statewide Assessment is a testing system that is based on the State Content Standards and tests students' knowledge, skills, and academic performance. The test is administered in the 10th grade in an on-demand situation under specified assessment conditions. The Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) is awarded to students who pass the Oregon Statewide Assessments. In 2000, the State Board of Education adopted Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 581-022-1111: Requesting an Exception to State Assessment Testing Procedures for the Certificate of Initial Mastery (Oregon Department of Education, 2002–2003). According to the OAR, the majority of high school students will obtain their CIM through statewide assessments and classroom-based work samples.

Information about Alternative Route in Oregon

The following table provides information on the **one alternative route** that has been created in Oregon for all students. Recall that in Oregon this alternative route is for obtaining a Certificate of Initial Mastery rather than the diploma, which may be obtained by all students who complete the necessary course of study. Additional information on the alternative route is presented after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Juried State Assessment	All students in grades 9–12	Parent, guardian, student	Impartial Panel of Experts	Three types of evidence fall within the Juried State Assessment: (1) A Collection of Evidence to the Oregon Department of Education for review; (2) A Modification Request to determine if a modification used during the administration of a state test should be considered an accommodation for the student for each particular test; or (3) A Proficiency-Based Admissions Standards System (PASS) transcript as evidence of having met CIM standards by meeting the corresponding PASS standards in a content area.

Juried State Assessment

Oregon allows for an alternative path for students who are unable to demonstrate mastery on one or more statewide assessments. **Juried Assessments** consist of a panel of experts who judge a collection of material submitted by a student that demonstrates his or her ability to meet the Certificate of Initial Mastery standards.

Students in grades 9–12 may request a Juried Assessment for the state reading/literature, writing, mathematics, mathematics problem solving, or science tests. If students choose an alternative pathway, there are three options available for them. At the request of a parent, guardian, or student, a district must submit one of the following:

1. A Collection of Evidence to the ODE for review;
2. A Modification Request to determine whether a modification used during the administration of a state test should be considered an accommodation for the student for each particular test; or
3. A Proficiency-Based Admissions Standards System (PASS) transcript as evidence of having met CIM standards by meeting the corresponding PASS standards in a content area.

A request for a Juried Assessment is handled through the student’s local school district, which reviews the request to determine its merits and forwards the request to the Oregon Department of Education. Collections of evidence are submitted by students who can demonstrate their ability to meet the CIM requirements for one or more content areas through classroom performance, but are unable to pass corresponding state assessments. In addition to the Collection of Evidence

that demonstrates the student’s mastery of the content and performance standards, the request must also include two individual teacher evaluations of the student work that confirm that the work demonstrates mastery, and a letter from the school district superintendent or designee requesting an impartial review panel to consider the request.

An impartial panel of experts reviews the student’s submissions and teacher’s verifications, looking for information to answer the following questions:

- Does the collection sufficiently represent the standards at the proficiency level?
- Have there been sufficiently varied opportunities and conditions for assessment?
- Is there sufficient evidence to be confident that the work represents the student?

A Modification Request implies a substantial change in the standard administration of a test. An accommodation may change the test presentation format, response format, setting in which the test is taken, timing, or scheduling, but it does not substantially change level, content, or performance criteria. A modification, on the other hand, is a substantial change in the standard administration of a test altering instructional level, content, and performance criteria. For instance, reading the Reading/Literature test to a student changes the test from a reading to a listening test. A Modification Request may be submitted prior to testing when there is a belief that the modification is the only way for a student to demonstrate knowledge and skills required for a CIM. The panel would consider evidence and determine whether the use of a modification affects reliability and validity in addressing a specific standard. If the panel decides that the change does not influence the validity of the test score for the student, the student’s score would be considered for meeting that CIM standard.

The PASS transcript is based on standards that describe the knowledge and skills students need to demonstrate to be accepted into any of Oregon’s seven public universities. The PASS transcript may be submitted to the Oregon Department of Education as evidence that a student meets a particular CIM requirement but is unable to meet the CIM standard on the related statewide assessment. If the collection of a student’s work earns a PASS Teacher Verification (PTV) rating of “meets,” “highly proficient,” or “exemplary,” a copy of the PASS transcript may be submitted to the Oregon Department of Education for evidence of meeting the CIM requirements.

Texas

The **Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)** is the graduation requirement for students enrolled in grade 8 or a lower grade on January 1, 2001, and graduating in the 2004–2005 school year or later. TAKS includes four subject areas: English language arts, math, science and

social studies. The test is based on the Texas Essentials Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which is the classroom curriculum. TAKS is taken for the first time in spring of the 11th grade year. The number of questions that students must answer correctly for each subject area to meet the standard, or pass, will increase over 3 years beginning in 2003–2004. During this transition period students are allowed to graduate under the passing standard that was in place when they started 10th grade. Members of the Class of 2007 will be the first students who will be required to meet the fully implemented standards.

Prior to this, the exit level **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)** test was the graduation requirement for students who were enrolled in grade 9 or a higher grade on January 1, 2001, regardless of when they graduate. TAAS is the graduation requirement for students graduating prior to 2004–2005 school year, regardless of whether they were enrolled in grade 8 or a lower grade on January 1, 2001.

Information about Alternative Route in Texas

The following table provides information about the **one alternative route** that has been created in Texas for students with disabilities.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Waiver	Student with IEP	No information	No information	Student receiving special education services who successfully completes the requirements of his or her IEP shall receive a high school diploma.

Waiver

Texas Administrative Code, title 19, Part 2, Chapter 101, Subchapter A, Rule 101.7 are the testing requirements for graduation. Paragraph C states that a student receiving special education services who successfully completes the requirements of his or her IEP shall receive a high school diploma (**waiver**).

Virginia

Virginia introduced the **Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course exams** in 1998. The previous high school graduation exam, Literacy Passport Test, has been phased out. The SOL tests are taken after students complete their required course work. To graduate with a standard diploma, students in the ninth grade classes of 2003–04 and beyond (graduating classes of 2007 and on) will have to receive two verified credits in English and one verified credit each in math, history/social science, and science, and one credit in an area of their own choice to be eligible for a standard diploma. The current end-of-course English consists of the Reading and the Writing tests. The Reading test includes 42 multiple choice operational items. The Writing test

has 30 operational multiple-choice items and 1 direct writing prompt (with 24 possible points). There is no time limit for completing the tests. All students are allowed to use calculators on the end-of-course mathematics tests. The test passing score for the SOL tests is 400 (proficient) on a scale of 0–600. There are three proficiency levels: pass/advanced, pass/proficient, and fails/does not meet the standard (below proficient). Trained readers with college degrees score the short papers that students write as a part of the writing test. The remainder of the test is in a multiple-choice format.

Districts may issue certificates of completion for students who do not qualify for a diploma. In addition, students with disabilities who have IEPs may also pursue a modified standard diploma which requires them to complete the course work and pass literacy and numeracy tests, or they may pursue a special diploma which is available to students with disabilities who complete their IEP requirements but do not need the requirements for other diplomas.

Information about Alternative Routes in Virginia

The following table provides information about the **two alternative routes** that have been created by Virginia—one for all students and one for students with disabilities. These are described more generally in the text after the table.

Name	Target group	Who requests	Who decides	Specific criteria
Substitute tests	All students	Local school	Local school	Students who score within 375–399 or who meet other specified criteria.
Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program	Students with disabilities starting in Grade 8	IEP team/504 committee	IEP team/504 committee	Student with an IEP or 504 plan who is enrolled in a course that has a SOL end-of-course test and/or the student is pursuing a Modified Standard Diploma; the student is unable to access the SOL assessments even with standard or nonstandard testing accommodations.

Substitute Tests

If students do not pass an end-of-course test, they may retake the exam at each regularly scheduled test administration. In addition, students who score within 375–399 or who meet other specified criteria may retake an alternate form of the test immediately within the same test administration. There are also **substitute tests** available for students within the same administration.

Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations on the SOL tests. If students cannot be accommodated on the regular SOL tests, they can take a portfolio assessment called the **Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP)**. The VSEP consists of a student’s Course Work Compilation (CWC), a selection of student work that shows to the review panel that the student has demonstrated proficiency in the SOL for a specific course/content area. The follow-

ing are the criteria for participating in the VSEP:

- The student has a current IEP or 504 plan;
- The student is enrolled in a course that has an SOL end-of-course test and/or the student is pursuing a modified standard diploma; and
- The impact of the student's disability demonstrates that the student will not be able to access the SOL assessments even with standard or nonstandard testing accommodations.

The IEP team/504 committee determines on a test-by-test and individual basis if a student is eligible to participate in the VSEP. Once the decision to participate using the VSEP has been made, the student's course content teacher and the student's special education teacher are responsible for creating an evaluation plan that explains how the student will demonstrate proficiency on specific standards of learning addressed in the course. After approval of the evaluation plan, the student's course content teacher and special education teacher must collect evidence of completion by the student in the CWC and submit the CWC and supporting documentation to the Virginia Department of Education, Division of Assessment and Reporting for scoring.

Appendix B

Web Sites of States with Alternative Routes

The home pages of the states that have alternative routes are provided in this appendix. We often found that it was difficult to find information on alternative routes on states' Web sites, and that information found at one point in time was frequently gone the next time that it was checked. Thus, we have not provided specific pages, but encourage readers to go searching for information on alternative routes in each of the 16 states.

Alaska

<http://www.educ.state.ak.us/>

California

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>

Florida

<http://www.fldoe.org/>

Georgia

<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/>

Indiana

<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/>

Massachusetts

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/>

Minnesota

http://education.state.mn.us/html/mde_home.htm

Mississippi

<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/>

New Jersey

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/>

New Mexico

<http://sde.state.nm.us/>

New York

<http://www.nysed.gov/>

North Carolina

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/>

Ohio

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>

Oregon

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/>

Texas

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>

Virginia

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/>

Appendix C

Comparison of Sources on Alternative Routes

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ...</i> , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004</i> , Education Week	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On</i> , Thompson & Thurlow, 2003
Alabama	There are no alternate diplomas for general education students who do not pass the exit exam. (p. 84)	Remediation of objectives failed is provided. (p. 21)	State has alternative criteria for students to earn standard diploma if they fail exit or end-of-course exams. (p. 109)	No options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)
Alaska	State board is in the process of promulgating a regulation that waives students from the exam under limited circumstances.(p. 86)	Students with disabilities can take an alternate form of the exam; students can take a different exam altogether; Students can petition for an exemption and still receive diploma. (p. 21)	State has non-standard diplomas or a tiered diploma system for students who fail exit exam (p. 109); State allows students with disabilities to take an alternate assessment. (p. 89)	“Other” ways to earn standard diploma, e.g., waiver, GED exit option (p. 31)
Arizona	There are no alternative routes to a diploma for general education students who do not pass exam; however, Arizona will not begin to withhold diplomas until the class of 2006. (p. 88)	Simply refers to “alternative method.” (p. 21)	Indicates that high stakes testing doesn’t begin until class of 2006 (p. 89); however, also says state allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements (p. 89)	Not referenced (because not currently withholding diplomas). (p.31)
California	Indicates that this process was originally scheduled for class of 2004, but now moved to class of 2006; also there is no appeals process for most students, but there are alternative considerations for students with disabilities. (pp. 90–91)	Not listed as having an alternate method, but that may be because high stakes testing doesn’t begin until 2006. (p. 21)	Indicates that high stakes testing doesn’t begin until 2006, and references an appeals process for students with disabilities beginning in 2006. (p. 89)	Appeals process only for students with disabilities. (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
Delaware	Not included in report.	Retake option only. (p. 21)	No options cited.	Not listed.
Florida	Indicated that at time of publication there were no waiver options, but that they were considering allowing a substitute exam; students with disabilities did have other options detailed in this report. (pp. 94–95)	Florida did not respond to the survey so its data were not included. (p. 21)	Indicates that students must pass exit exams in order to get diploma, but also indicates that state allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	“Other” ways to earn standard diploma, e.g., waiver, GED exit option. (p. 31)
Georgia	Waiver option for all students, including students with disabilities. (pp. 96–97)	Students with disabilities can petition for an exemption and still receive diploma. (p. 21)	State has an appeals process that includes students with disabilities. (p. 89)	Appeals process that includes students with disabilities. (p. 31)
Hawaii	Not listed.	Retake option only. (p. 21)	Not listed.	Not included.
Idaho	Not listed.	No response to question. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Not included.
Indiana	Students can apply for waivers in lieu of passing the exam. (p. 98)	No survey response. (p. 21)	State has an appeals process that includes students with disabilities; state allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Appeals process that includes students with disabilities. (p. 31)
Louisiana	Four opportunities to pass. No appeals or waivers. (p. 100)	No response to question. (p. 21)	State has no other options for earning a standard diploma. (p. 89)	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
Maryland	No other options for graduation; however, first class this requirement applies to is the class of 2008. (pp. 102–103)	No options other than retake. (p. 21)	State has no other options for earning a standard diploma (p. 89); State has alternative criteria for students to earn standard diplomas if they fail exit or end-of-course exams. (p. 109)	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)
Massachusetts	Outlines performance appeals process for certain eligible students both with and without disabilities. (pp. 104–105)	Students with disabilities can take an alternate form of the exam, and students can petition for an exemption and still receive a diploma. (p. 21)	State has an appeals process that includes students with disabilities, and state allows students with disabilities to take an alternate assessment. (p. 89)	Appeals process that includes students with disabilities. (p. 31)
Minnesota	No alternative route for most students; students with disabilities may have alternate and modified assessments as well as exemption based on IEP or 504 plan. (pp. 106–107)	Students with disabilities can take a different exam, or IEP team can exempt. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)
Mississippi	Opportunities for retake, and in some instances, alternate assessments, are given to students who qualify. (pp. 108–109)	Students with disabilities can retake exam, or take a different exam altogether. (p. 21)	State has appeals process for those who fail exit or end-of-course exams (p. 109); state allows students with disabilities to take an alternate assessment. (p. 89)	For students with disabilities there is a juried or performance assessment. (p. 31)
Nevada	No options if students fail exam. Exempt diploma option exists for students with IEPs. (pp. 110–111)	Did not respond to survey (p. 21)	State has no other options for earning a standard diploma. (p. 89)	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
New Jersey	In addition to opportunities to retake the exam, students can go through Special Review Assessment (SRA) that allows them to demonstrate proficiency via performance assessment. For students with disabilities, the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) is a portfolio assessment for those for whom the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) is not appropriate. (pp. 112–113)	Students with disabilities can take a different exam. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)
New Mexico	School can initiate a waiver request for student who fails exit exam; Students with disabilities can also be assessed using two alternate assessments. (pp. 114-115)	Students with disabilities can take an alternate form of the exam; alternative completion diploma if coursework complete and documentation of 3 attempts to pass all subtests, state uses different exams during a retake. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
New York	Students can take alternate assessments in lieu of the Regents exam, such as Advanced Placement tests, SAT II, International Baccalaureate, and the Advanced International Certificate of Education examination. Students with disabilities can be assessed with the Alternate Assessment of the Regents Competency Test. (pp. 116–117)	Students with disabilities can take a different exam altogether. (p. 21)	Although New York requires students to pass the Regents exams to receive a Regents diploma, students can pass the Regents Competency Test to earn a local diploma (p. 89); State has alternative criteria for students to earn standard diplomas if they fail exit or end-of-course exams. (p. 109)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)
North Carolina	Students have a maximum of 13 opportunities to retake the exams. Scores from standardized, nationally-normed tests that are normed on a sample representative of the public school population in 1992 or later may be used for competency screening. Students with disabilities may be exempted in writing from taking the competency tests. (pp. 118–119)	Responses indicated that the decisions on this were still pending or under discussion when this was published. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to take an alternate assessment. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
Ohio	Students can meet the testing requirement for earning a diploma by passing four of the five tests, provided several strict criteria are met, including scoring within 10 points of proficient, 97% attendance record for four years of high school, attaining a GPA of at least 2.5 in the subject area missed, and participating in any intervention program outside the normal school day with a 97% attendance rate. Students with disabilities whose IEPs so specify can be exempted from having to pass the graduation exams. (pp. 120–121).	Students with disabilities can be exempted by IEP team decision. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements (p. 89); State has alternate criteria for students to earn standard diploma if they fail exit or end-of-course exams. (p. 109)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)
South Carolina	No alternative routes. (pp. 122–123)	Students with disabilities can take an alternate form of the exam. (p. 21)	State has no other option for earning a standard diploma (p. 89)	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment (p. 31)
Tennessee	No alternative routes. (pp. 124–125)	Students with disabilities can take an alternate test. (p. 21)	State has no other option for earning a standard diploma. (p. 89)	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)
Texas	No alternative routes for most students. Students with disabilities whose IEPs permit, may earn a standard diploma without passing the TAKS. (pp. 126–127)	No option other than retake. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (e.g. alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)

	<i>State High School Exit Exams Put to the Test, Center on Education Policy, 2003</i>	<i>National Study on Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options ... , Johnson & Thurlow, 2003</i>	<i>Count Me In—Quality Counts 2004, Education Week</i>	<i>2003 State Special Education Outcomes: Marching On, Thompson & Thurlow, 2003</i>
Utah	No alternative routes other than retaking the tests. (pp. 129–129)	Reponses indicate that there are alternative methods for students with disabilities. (p. 21)	Indicates high stakes testing begins to count in 2006–07, and that they will have an appeals process in place by then. Also indicates that they allow students with disabilities to receive a standard diploma if they have not met regular graduation requirements. (p. 89)	Students with disabilities can earn a standard diploma without passing the graduation assessment (i.e., alternate graduation route available). (p. 31)
Virginia	In addition to multiple opportunities to retake the tests, students may take substitute tests to meet the verified credit requirements. Students with disabilities can use a portfolio assessment called the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP). (pp. 130–131)	No option other than retake. (p. 21)	State allows students with disabilities to take an alternate assessment (p. 89); State has alternative criteria for students to earn a standard diploma if they fail exit or end-of-course exams. (p. 109)	Juried or Performance Assessment. (p. 31)
Washington	No opportunities to retake the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Diplomas will not be withheld until 2008. Students with disabilities can take a portfolio assessment. (pp. 132–133).	Not included in this report.	Indicates high stakes testing is beginning in 2008 (pp. 89 & 109).	State has no options available other than passing regular graduation assessment. (p. 31)