

Georgia

Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) and Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT)

Part I: Policy Trends

Type of test	Comprehensive standards-based
Purpose	<p>The purpose of the exam is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that students qualifying for a diploma have mastered essential core academic content and skills. All students seeking a Georgia high school diploma must pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) in four content areas as well as the Georgia High School Writing Assessment. • Provide schools with student academic diagnostic information • Determine prospective high school graduates' mastery of the state curriculum • Encourage districts and schools to identify and serve students at risk of academic failure • Provide data to state policymakers on student attainment of state education goals to inform educational policy decisions • Increase alignment of local curriculum and programs of instruction with state education standards • Promote equity of opportunity across all student groups • Meet a state mandate and a state board of education rule
Major changes in exit exam policy since 2007-08 school year or any pending changes	<p>Science and English language arts GHSGT were aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for the first time in the spring of 2008. The social studies exam transitioned to a GPS test in the spring of 2010, and the mathematics exam will transition in the spring of 2011. Student scores on GPS-aligned GHSGT are reported in four performance levels: below proficiency, basic proficiency, advanced proficiency, and honors. To meet the testing requirements for graduation, a student must score in basic proficiency or above.</p> <p>The GHSGT in mathematics is still based on the Quality Core Curriculum, and for 2010 still had 3 reporting categories: fail, pass, and pass-plus. In spring 2011, new test performance standards will be set for the GHSGT in mathematics, and scores will be reported in the same 4 performance categories listed above for ELA, science, and social studies.</p>

Status of state’s decision regarding the Common Core State Standards and impact of that decision on exit exam policies	GHSWT is an on-demand essay writing assessment. Student performances is reported as Does Not Meet, Meets, and Exceeds. To meet the testing requirements for graduation, a student must score a Meets or Exceeds.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admission?	Georgia has adopted the Common Core State Standards in both English language arts and math.
Year first administered	As of spring 2008 with the launch of the GPS-based ELA GHSWT, the colleges/universities within the University System of Georgia have permitted students scoring at Advanced Proficiency or higher on the ELA test to enroll in credit-bearing courses without taking additional tests. Students who do not score this high may need to take additional tests, and if not successful are placed in remedial, non-credit bearing courses.
Year diplomas first withheld	1991
Subjects tested	1994
Types of questions	GHSWT in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and GHSWT (writing assessment)
Grade first administered	Multiple-choice items comprise the GHSWT; GHSWT is a writing prompt/essay
Grade(s) exam aligned to	11 th ; The main administration for the GHSWT takes place in the fall, and main administration for the GHSWT in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies occurs in the spring of 11 th grade.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	GHSWT and GHSWT include subject area content from courses that a student may encounter in 9 th -11 th grades. Most students who are on track will encounter the bulk of test content on the GHSWT and GHSWT in grades 9 and 10. The GHSWT in ELA reflects American Literature and Composition Course that most districts usually offer in 11 th grade. All depend on the course-taking pattern of the student.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Five. Students who do not pass on the first attempt have multiple opportunities to receive additional instruction, retest, and qualify for graduation before the spring of 12 th grade.

Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all other graduation requirements (i.e., exited school with a certificate of attendance) are allowed to retake the exit exam as many times as they need to after 12 th grade to receive a regular diploma.
Does the state have reciprocity with other states?	No
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind?	As of the 2009-10 school year, the NCLB-AYP calculations now include any student who is a first time test taker regardless of grade. Ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders can count as first-time test takers.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes, for ELA based on GPS. The mathematics GHSGT has been enhanced for NCLB accountability purposes. Additional items have been added to better address the depth and breadth of the curriculum. The enhanced tests also have two additional cut scores for the “proficient” and “advanced” levels. These performance levels are used to calculate adequate yearly progress (AYP) for NCLB purposes but do not affect a student’s chance of earning a diploma. Students must achieve a score of 500 to graduate and a score of 516 in mathematics to be counted as proficient for adequate yearly progress under NCLB. Beginning in spring 2008, the new Georgia Performance Standards-based English language arts (ELA) and science tests have the same performance standard for NCLB proficiency determinations and diploma eligibility. This standard is “basic proficiency,” which matches a scale score of 200 or higher. School accountability and student accountability performance levels for “AYP proficient” will be the same in spring 2011 and will be set to a scale score of 200.
Has the state considered changing the cut score needed to pass the exam for graduation purposes?	When a test transitions to GPS, the test is considered a new test, and therefore a new standard setting is held. The test is put on a different scaling system to distinguish it from forms of the test on prior curriculum.
Evaluations of state exit exam	The GHSGT in English language arts and mathematics were externally evaluated in spring 2006 by Norman Webb, a senior research scientist with the Wisconsin Center for Education Research and the National Institute for Science Education. In addition, the new GHSGT in English language arts and science

State test contractor

were externally evaluated by Ellen Forte, president of edCount, LLC, a consultancy group providing services in the areas of education assessment, evaluation, data management, reporting, and accountability. These evaluations are available from the GaDOE upon request.

Pearson for GHS GT
Georgia Center for Assessment at the University of Georgia for GHS WT

Does the state provide students with alternate paths to graduation?

The state has a process for students seeking a waiver of the GHS GT. Any student experiencing a substantial hardship may request a waiver if either one or both of the following minimum eligibility requirements are met: a student who, due to disability, is rendered incapable of passing a section of the GHS GT, or a student who has not had a reasonable opportunity to pass a section of the GHS GT due to substantial hardship beyond the student's control, such as a significant, unique, and demonstrable economic, technological, legal, or other type of deprivation. Students who are granted the waiver and meet all other requirements may receive a diploma from the local school district.

In addition, there is a variance process that allows a student to demonstrate academic proficiency on a GHS GT using other academic assessments. The State Board of Education (SBOE) may, by majority vote, grant a variance to students who have satisfied all of the following requirements:

- 1) The student has attempted the relevant section(s) of the high school graduation assessment four or more times without passing; and
- 2) The student has successfully completed a structured remedial class(es) after each unsuccessful attempt; and
- 3) The student has passed any three of the five high school graduation assessments; and
- 4) The student has obtained a scale score that falls within one standard error of measurement for passing the relevant section of the high school graduation assessment; and
- 5) The student has met the attendance requirements as described in SBOE rule; and
- 6) The student has a 90% or better attendance record, excluding excused absences, while enrolled in grades 9-12; and
- 7) The student has met the course unit requirements for graduation as described in the applicable SBOE high school graduation requirements rule; and
- 8) The student has met one of the following requirements:

(a) Where applicable, the student has successfully passed each of the end-of-course tests related to the sections of the high school graduation assessment in which the variance is being sought, or

(b) Where applicable, the student has attained the minimum required score on another qualified academic achievement test as defined by the SBOE and the Georgia Department of Education.

In the 2008-09 school year, 76 students used the general waiver path and 851 used the variance path. In the 2009-10 school year, 111 students used the waiver path and 596 used the variance path. The number of waivers and variances granted in a given year cannot be compared to the total number of students who graduate to yield a percentage because the comparison groups are heterogeneous. A preponderance of the waivers and variances were granted to students who were on track to graduate in a previous year.

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners

No. However, English language learners may apply for the waiver or variance described.

There are a variety of language-responsive accommodations, such as a word-to-word translation dictionary.

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities

No. However, students with disabilities may apply for the waiver described above. A special education diploma is also available for students with disabilities who complete the requirements of their individualized education program.

There are a variety of accommodations allowed, such as extended time, frequent breaks, and flexible schedule. More details are available online in the student assessment handbook at www.gadoe.org

In the 2008-09 school year, 28 students with disabilities used the waiver path. In the 2009-10 school year, 66 students with disabilities used the waiver path. At this time, the state does not have data on students with disabilities using the variance path. The number of waivers and variances granted in a given year cannot be compared to the total number of students graduating to yield a percentage because the comparison groups are heterogeneous. A preponderance of the waivers and variances were granted to students who were on track to graduate in a previous year.

Who makes decisions on whether a student is eligible to use alternate paths?

The local school district determines eligibility based on specific criteria outlined in the SBOE rule, guidelines, and guidance. Local school boards submit eligible waivers and variances to the SBOE for consideration.

How are students identified as eligible for alternate paths to graduate?

Local school boards submit applications for waivers and variances with all supporting documents as evidence. If application is complete and meets the criteria, it is sent to State Board of Education. If not, it is returned to the school district.

When calculating the graduation rate for AYP purposes, does the state count students taking alternate paths together with graduates who passed the high school exit exams?

Yes, if students were on track to graduate within the time frame the waiver or variance was granted. Districts can report the students who are granted a waiver or variance during the summer graduate data collection. To be counted as a graduate (i.e., earns a “regular” diploma), the student must have completed successfully the required courses in specified areas, must have the total number of required Carnegie units (required plus elective courses), and must have met the testing requirements either by passing the GHS GT and GHS WT or by being granted a waiver or variance under the conditions prescribed by state board rule.

How many full-time equivalent staff in the state department of education are involved in implementing alternate paths?

1 full time; .75 administrative support; 1 hourly (20 hours per week)

Types of assistance the state provides for all districts to raise *initial* pass rates for all students on the high school exit exam

The state offers technical assistance to help districts in several areas:

- State department provides ongoing face-to-face and webinar trainings on the curriculum. The state provides a wealth of resources on the gps.org Web site. Detailed frameworks provide lesson plans and help teachers understand how to provide instruction and assess the standards and elements within the curriculum. Model lessons are provided via video recordings.
- District teachers become more proficient in their content area, by availing themselves of online assistance, field-based specialists, and train-the-trainer workshops;
- Schools identify and target students for assistance. Districts and schools can learn these data analysis skills via online assistance, specialist(s) in the state education agency, field-based specialists, train-the-trainer workshops, graduation coaches, Graduation Counts guide, and data utilization guide; Response to

Intervention training has been provided to school districts with the goal of providing students continuing support at various levels of intensity

- Schools implement comprehensive school reform with the assistance of specialist(s) in the state education agency, field-based specialists, train-the-trainer workshops, and grants to districts;
- Districts improve formative uses of assessment. Resources and training are made available to districts and schools. Such mechanisms include online assistance, field-based specialists, train-the-trainer workshops, a data utilization guide, and a balanced assessment module. In addition, the Online Assessment System makes a wealth of items available for formative assessment purposes. Teachers can use these items for classroom assessment and districts may use these for benchmarking;
- Districts improve professional development for teachers with the support of the state via content area specialists from the state department and teams dispersed throughout the state, train-the-trainer workshops, and additional professional development opportunities. Training is offered via face-to-face sessions or through the use of webinars;
- All districts improve the instructional leadership provided by administrators. The state department of education provides field-based specialists in building leadership. The department also works in conjunction with the Georgia Performance Standards (the agency that deals with educator certification) to provide training for administrators and sessions on how to raise standards.

The state also provides:

- State-developed benchmark/formative assessments
Note: Georgia supports the use of formative assessments through an application called the Online Assessment System (OAS). This is a Web-based resource that contains an item bank from which schools and systems can build customized assessments in all the grade/content areas covered by the state assessment system. This facilitates formative assessments at the school and system level. At the state level, the state also provides “pre-built” formative assessments within the OAS that systems and schools are able to use.
- Test items from prior years are released into OAS for classroom use and for districts to use in building their

Types of assistance or remediation the state provides for all districts to help students who have failed to pass the exit exam

own benchmarks.

- Exam preparation materials for students and teachers
 1. GHSGT and GHSWT Content Descriptions are documents describing the standards and elements assessed on each instrument.
 2. GHSGT Student Guides are also provided.
- During the 2009-10 school year, the department launched online courses in Science and Social Studies based on the Project ExPreSS model. These courses, made available through Georgia Virtual School, were free and were open to any student enrolled in Georgia public schools. They were designed for practice for first-time attempters or as remediation for students who had failed in a past attempt.

The state provides:

- Targeted remediation programs for students;
- Additional professional development for teachers in their content areas;
- Additional professional development for teachers in meeting the specific needs of students at risk of academic failure;
- Additional professional development for teachers in the formative uses of assessment;
- Graduation coaches, leadership quality initiatives, and secondary leadership facilitators dedicated to supporting high schools and helping them increase graduation rates, in part by counseling students to enroll in more rigorous courses so they are better prepared for the GHSGT.
- RTI training and support

In summer 2009, the department launched Project ExPress, a two-week intensive face-to-face remediation for the GHSGT in Science and Social Studies. Open to all students who still needed to pass these sections of the GHSGT. This opportunity was repeated in summer 2010. See:

<https://www.georgiastandards.org/resources/Pages/Tools/ExPreSSPrograms.aspx>

During the 2009-10 school year, the department launched online courses in Science and Social Studies based on the Project ExPreSS model. These courses, made available through Georgia Virtual School, were free to students and were open to any student enrolled in Georgia public schools. These were designed for practice for first-time attempters or as remediation for students who had failed in a past attempt.

Does the state provide funding for remediation?

There is not a specific fund directed to schools solely for GHSGT remediation, but many of the initiatives described above are funded by the state. For example, the OAS is a bank of items available for formative assessment and remediation and is funded by the state. Project ExPreSS, both the face-to-face and online models, has been totally funded by the state, primarily through school improvement funds.

Are districts mandated by law to provide remediation?

Yes, according to state board rule 160-4-2-.37, any district operating a high school must offer summer school remediation in accordance with board guide lines if the General Assembly appropriates the funds. Due to the current economic crisis, many districts did not have their own funds to run summer schools in all content areas; however, funds from the department's school improvement division provided a means for offering assistance targeted for students failing the science or social studies portion of the GHSGT via Project ExPreSS, both face-to-face and online models.

Are students required to participate in remediation?

No. However, to become eligible for a variance, a student must have successfully completed a structured remedial class after each unsuccessful attempt on the test.

Part II: Student Performance**Initial pass rates, 2008-09**

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try in 11th grade, 2008-09					
Student Group	Writing	Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies
All students	91%	92%	95%	90%	88%
White	95%	96%	98%	95%	93%
African American	87%	88%	91%	84%	81%
Latino	86%	88%	94%	85%	84%
Asian	94%	94%	98%	95%	94%
Native American	94%	93%	96%	92%	95%
English language learners	67%	68%	88%	71%	68%
Migrant	63%	74%	92%	84%	76%
Students with disabilities	59%	60%	66%	59%	56%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	86%	87%	91%	84%	81%
Passing score 200 on ELA, Science and Social Studies (scale 100 to 350 or above depends upon subject); 500	200	200	500	200	500

**on Math (scale of 400-600)
(Writing is 100 to 350)**

Note: Data retrieved from Governor's Office of Student Achievement 2008-09 State Report Card at <http://www.gadoe.org/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=102&StateId=ALL&T=1> on June 10, 2010.

Denominator used when calculating these rates: The number of 11th grade students enrolled the day of testing.

For 2010 AYP calculations, students who are first-time test takers from any grade will be included. This will be reflected in the Report Card for the 2009-10 school year.

Student Group	State Graduation Rates	
	2008-09	2009-10
All students	79%	
White	83%	
African American	74%	
Latino	71%	
Asian	91%	
Native American	81%	
English language learners	55%	
Migrant	49%	
Students with disabilities	41%	
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	73%	

Note: Data retrieved from Governor's Office of Student Achievement 2008-09 State Report Card at <http://www.gadoe.org/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=102&StateId=ALL&T=1> on June 10, 2010.

Current state graduation rate calculation formula for AYP purposes

Georgia uses the Leaver Rate, but also includes "other completers" in the denominator. "Other completers" are students who did not receive a regular diploma but received some form of exit credentials. Georgia does not count GED recipients as completers.