

Abstract Title Page
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Title:

Standards and Excellence: Evidence from Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

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Abstract Body
Limit 5 pages single spaced.

Background/context:

Description of prior research and/or its intellectual context and/or its policy context.

The so-called “First Wave” of education reform began roughly three decades ago as states began introducing exit exams, which students were required to pass in order to graduate from public high schools. States have continued to introduce these standards-based requirements as well as to adjust their academic content. Currently, 26 states, which collectively serve 75% of all minority students, deny diplomas on the basis of exit-exam performance (CEP, 2008).

The effects of exit exams on school enrollment and educational attainment have been the subject of a number of recent studies. However, relatively little is known about the effects of state exit exams on the educational experiences and outcomes of higher-achieving students. State exit exams may improve outcomes among such students by improving school quality and by shaping social norms among students (e.g., attenuating “nerd harassment”). However, it has also been suggested that standards-based reforms may harm the outcomes of higher-achieving students both by redirecting school resources and effort to lower-performing students (i.e., a “triage” effect) and by signaling low expectations to students. For example, 25 years ago, the influential “A Nation at Risk” report deprecated the first generation of exit exams arguing that they “fall short of what is needed, as the ‘minimum’ tends to become the ‘maximum,’ thus lowering educational standards for all.”

Purpose/objective/research question/focus of study:

Description of what the research focused on and why.

This study assesses the effects of state exit exams on the student utilization of and performance on Advanced Placement (AP) exams. AP programs have become an increasingly popular way of providing fairly standardized and academically rigorous academic experiences that can prepare high school students for the transition to post-secondary schooling. Furthermore, participation in AP exams can also have implications for college affordability because high performance on AP exams often qualifies as college credit. Therefore, whether state exit exams have either promoted or attenuated AP utilization and performance is both a particularly policy-relevant question.

Setting:

Specific description of where the research took place.

As described below, we use a national state-year panel, so the population is the entire country.

Population/Participants/Subjects:

Description of participants in the study: who (or what) how many, key features (or characteristics).

See above.

Intervention/Program/Practice:

Specific description of the intervention, including what it was, how it was administered, and its duration.

States typically began allowing students to take exit exams in 8th or 9th grade with multiple opportunities for re-testing. One of key developments in the evolution of exit exams during the last 30 years has been an increase in the level of academic content covered by these exams. Furthermore, in recent years, several states have begun using “end-of-course” exams as exit exams. Our analysis focuses on state-year measures of exit exams that reflect this heterogeneity in their design.

Research Design:

Description of research design (e.g., qualitative case study, quasi-experimental design, secondary analysis, analytic essay, randomized field trial).

Our assessment of the effects of exit exams on AP-related outcomes (i.e., utilization and performance) is based on a panel-based, quasi-experimental research design applied to state-by-year data. Specifically, our basic specification conditions on state and year effects as well as observables that vary within states over time. The key identifying assumption in this quasi-experimental research design is that the within-state timing of exit exams can be viewed as conditionally random. We assess the importance of this assumption for the internal validity of our research design through several robustness checks.

We will also estimate a slight variation of this specification, which is often referred to as a comparative interrupted time-series. In this specification, we will include state-specific pre-policy (i.e., pre-exist exam) time trends, so that the impact of exit exams are estimated as the post-policy deviation from pre-existing trend (controlling for any secular time trends, which are identified primarily by states that never adopt an exit exam).

Data Collection and Analysis:

Description of plan for collecting and analyzing data, including description of data.

Our key data are state-by-year data on the number of students participating in AP exams and the performance of participating students on these exams over the last 30 years. For the 1990-2008 period, we also have data on AP participation defined by gender, race and ethnicity

Findings/Results:

Description of main findings with specific details.

Pending. We have all data in hand, and will complete analyses in January/February.

Conclusions:

Description of conclusions and recommendations of author(s) based on findings and over study. (To support the theme of 2009 conference, authors are asked to describe how their conclusions and recommendations might inform one or more of the above noted decisions—curriculum, teaching and teaching quality, school organization, and education policy.)

Pending.

Appendixes
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Appendix A. References

References are to be in APA format. (See APA style examples at the end of the document.)

Insert Reference text here

Dee, T.S. "The 'First Wave' of Accountability," in *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of Accountability*, Paul Petersen and Martin West, editors, Brookings Institution Press, 2003.

Dee, T.S. and B.A. Jacob. "Do High School Exit Exams Influence Educational Attainment or Labor Market Performance?" in *Standards-Based Reform and Children in Poverty: Lessons for "No Child Left Behind"*, Adam Gamoran, editor, Brookings Institution Press, 2007.