



State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition



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About the Center on Education Policy

Based in Washington, D.C., at the George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. CEP helps Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we try to help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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Executive Summary and Study Methods

Since 2002, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at The George Washington University, a national advocate for public education and improving public schools, has been studying state high school exit examinations—tests students must pass to receive a high school diploma. This year marks the 11th year CEP has reported on exit exams in order to help policymakers reach informed decisions about assessment policies in their states. Information from this year’s report comes from several sources: a formal verification process through which department of education officials in states with exit exams confirmed and updated information about their exit exam policies from CEP’s previous reports on this topic; a special survey of states both with and without exit exams about the future of these policies; state Web sites; media reports; and past CEP publications.

Chapter 1 of this report focuses on the present status of state high school exit exam policies, including which states have exit exams, specific characteristics of these exams, how many students are impacted, and changes that have occurred in these policies over the past year. Chapter 2 discusses the future of these policies, such as the shift to assess college and career readiness and the impact of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and common assessments. Chapter 3 reviews states’ past 11 years of experience in implementing exit exams to draw out lessons that may be valuable to state leaders and policymakers as they decide about future policy changes and their implementation.

For purposes of this study, we considered states to have a high school exit exam if they require their students to pass, rather than just take, an assessment or series of assessments to receive a high school diploma. States that allow school districts to decide whether to require students to pass an exam to graduate were not considered to have state exit exams. Further, references in this report to states with “exit exam policies” are intended to cover both states that currently administer exit exams and those that are phasing in a graduation exam requirement by a specific future date.

Broad conclusions and key findings

Based on the evidence from this year’s study, CEP has reached three broad conclusions about state high school exit exams, as well as several key findings that relate to each of these conclusions.

Conclusion 1: Although state policies continue to evolve, high school exit exams remain a substantial force in education policy, currently affecting nearly 7 out of 10 public school students across the nation.

- ▶ **Twenty-five states administered exit exams in school year 2011-12, and a 26th state (Rhode Island) is planning to implement an exit exam requirement for the class of 2014.** In two states (Oklahoma and Oregon), the graduating class of 2012 was the first group of students impacted by these policies.
- ▶ **Nearly 7 out of 10 students, and an even larger share of students of color, attend school in states with exit exams.** Sixty-nine percent of the nation's students are enrolled in states with exit exams, including 71% of African American students, 85% of Hispanic students, 71% of low-income students, and 83% of English language learners (ELLs).
- ▶ **Four states have recently decided to phase out their exit exam requirements.** North Carolina and Tennessee made this change for the 2011-12 school year, and Alabama will eliminate its exit exam requirement with the graduating class of 2015. Georgia began phasing out its exit exam requirement for all subjects except writing in 2011-12.
- ▶ **End-of-course (EOC) exams continue to grow in popularity.** In recent years, several states have shifted from using comprehensive exit exams, which assess multiple subjects on the same test, to EOC exams, which test students' mastery of the content in a particular course. Nine states required students in the class of 2012 to pass EOC exams to graduate, an increase from the two states with EOC exit exams in 2002. An additional six states required students in the class of 2012 to take EOC exams that are not considered exit exams because students do not have to pass them to graduate.
- ▶ **The percentage of students who pass exit exams on the first try varies by state and by subject but generally ranges from 70% to 90% with few exceptions.** Initial pass rates are important because students who fail exit exams on the first try may have very different school experiences from those who pass, even if students who fail the first time eventually pass the exam before graduation.
- ▶ **All states with exit exams provide students who fail these exams on the first try with opportunities to retake them before the end of 12th grade, and many states offer alternate paths to graduation for students who continue to struggle to pass the exams.** Twenty-two of the 26 states with current or future exit exams offer alternate paths to graduation for general education students who fail the exams, and 22 (though not always the same 22) offer alternate paths specifically for students with disabilities. Only three states provide alternate paths specifically designed for English language learners who fail these exams.
- ▶ **States that continue to administer exit exams reported making some policy changes over the past year, such as introducing new exams, setting cut scores to reflect college readiness, and delaying the implementation of new exit exam requirements.** Some states also reported making changes in response to state budget cuts, including eliminating exit exams in some subjects and offering fewer retake opportunities for students who fail.

Conclusion #2: Exit exams are becoming assessments of college and career readiness. Many states plan to use the Common Core State Standards, and often the common assessments, as a vehicle for this transition.

- ▶ **More states with exit exams are requiring students to pass these exams in an attempt to ensure graduates are prepared for college and careers, among other reasons.** Twelve of the 22 states with exit exams that responded to CEP's special survey said that their exit exam requirement is intended to ensure their students are ready for college and/or a career. CEP first asked states in 2004 about the purpose of their exit exam policies, and at that time only one state (Georgia) specifically noted that its exit exam was intended for this purpose.
- ▶ **Most states with exit exam policies have not yet aligned these exams to what they describe as college- and career-readiness standards, but many are planning to do so.** Most states that are aligning their exit exams to college- and career-readiness standards are using the CCSS, or standards designed specifically for their state, or a combination of both for this purpose.
- ▶ **Very few states with exit exam policies report that scores from these exams are used by postsecondary education institutions for admission, placement, or scholarship decisions.** It is important to note, however, that in several states the survey respondents, who represent state elementary and secondary education departments, did not have this information. For example, respondents from 17 states said exit exams are *not* used by postsecondary institutions to make decisions about student admissions, while respondents from eight states did not have this information.
- ▶ **Many states with exit exams that have also adopted the CCSS intend to maintain their requirement that students pass exit exams in English language arts and math to receive a high school diploma.** Specifically, 13 of the 22 states with exit exams that responded to our survey and have adopted the CCSS plan to maintain their exit exam requirement, and 5 additional states are not yet sure.
- ▶ **Most states with exit exams that have also adopted the CCSS plan to replace their current exit exams in English language arts and math with new assessments aligned to the common standards.** Ten states plan to replace their exams with the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), while three states plan to use the common assessments being developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment consortium. Two states plan to replace their current exit exams with new state assessments aligned to the common standards but have not yet specified which exams.
- ▶ **A large majority of states that plan to replace their current exams with assessments aligned to the common standards expect their new assessments to be more rigorous than the current ones.** No state responded that this requirement would make its exit exam less rigorous, and only one state said the rigor of its requirement would stay about the same (Oregon for English language arts only). One state respondent (Massachusetts) said the state is not yet sure how the rigor of its exit exam requirement will be impacted.

Conclusion #3: Although the success of exit exam policies remains questionable, state policymakers can learn a great deal from states' past experiences with implementing new exit exam policies.

- **States have faced a number of challenges in implementing exit exam policies, including opposition from key education stakeholders, political disagreements or changes in state leadership, legal battles, low student passing rates, and high costs.** In many states, these challenges have led to delays in implementation and changes (ranging from small to significant) in exit exam policies.
- **States have often responded to these challenges by offering alternate routes to graduation or alternate diplomas for some or all students and/or by funding remediation programs for students who struggle to pass exit exams.** Regardless of how state leaders and policymakers have chosen to respond, successful implementation of an exit exam policy has required a great deal of flexibility from all education stakeholders.
- **Even with the introduction of student support services and alternate routes, the impacts of exit exams on student achievement, dropout rates, and other outcomes for historically lower-performing groups are not fully known and have yet to be fully addressed.** Disparities in passing rates for different student groups continue to be a concern in states with exit exams.
- **Successful implementation of a new exit exam policy or changes to an existing policy often depend on states' willingness to take certain actions.** These actions include (among other things) maintaining the support of key state leaders and the public, implementing new or revised exit exam policies over several years rather than all at once, maintaining flexibility to adapt policies to meet changing times and needs, and making a full financial commitment. States should also keep in mind that policies not directly related to exit exams, such as requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, can still have an impact on these exams.
- **Several key questions about the success of exit exam policies remain unresolved.** For example, have exit exams actually raised student achievement as intended? Also, will these exams ever be meaningful indicators for institutions of higher education or employers? State leaders have an ongoing responsibility to ensure the success of the reforms they enact; therefore, more monitoring, research, and evaluation is needed.

Study methods

CEP used a variety of methods to collect and analyze data for this year's study. For example, the data reported in chapter 1 were collected through a formal verification process that asked department of education officials in states with exit exams to confirm and update information about their exit exam policies. Data for chapter 2 were collected via a special survey developed and administered by CEP to these same state education officials, both in states with and without exit exams. Finally, data for chapter 3 came from media reports and state education department documents CEP has collected over the past 11 years of studying exit exams, in addition to a review of past CEP studies on this topic.

Formal Verification with State Education Leaders

In the spring of 2012, chief state school officers were contacted and asked to designate state education department personnel who would serve as CEP's contact for this year's study. These individuals were contacted via email and sent their state's 2011 profile of exit exam policies. We asked each state contact to review last year's profile and update it with any new information regarding exit exam policies in their state.

Once the profiles were submitted by state contacts, they were edited and returned to the state contact for final verification.

These state profiles were analyzed in order to report the findings in chapter 1 of this report. However, because events in this field move quickly, some policies will undoubtedly have changed soon after publication of this report.

CEP received updated profiles from all of the states with assessments that meet the definition of high school exit exams used for this study (see **box A**) except for Texas—a response rate of 25 of the 26 states with these policies. Data from Texas’ 2011 profile were used for this part of the report. We also received updated information for profiles from the following states that administer exit exams but do not require students to pass them for graduation: Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Box A

CEP’s criteria for identifying states with high school exit exams

In order to be described as a state with a high school exit exam, the state must require students to *pass*, not just take, state exit exams to receive a high school diploma, even if students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grades. The exams are a state mandate rather than a local option—in other words, the state requires students in all school districts to pass an exit exam (such as a state assessment or end-of-course exams) or to pass an exam the student chooses from a list of state-approved assessments to meet this requirement, rather than allowing districts to decide whether to make the exams a condition of graduation.

Special State Survey

CEP developed a state survey to collect information from states with exit exams and those without about the future of their state assessment policies. The survey instrument was reviewed both internally and externally by content experts and survey methodologists. The survey was piloted by one state with exit exams (Ohio) and one without exit exams (West Virginia) in advance and then administered electronically to the state education department personnel originally designated by state chiefs as our contacts for this study. Survey responses were received from the 45 states shown in **box B**.

Box B

States responding to CEP’s special survey on the future of exit exams

States with current or planned high school exit exam policies

Alabama	Florida	Maryland	New Mexico	Oregon
Alaska	Georgia	Massachusetts	New Jersey	Rhode Island
Arizona	Idaho	Minnesota	New York	South Carolina
Arkansas	Indiana	Mississippi	Ohio	Virginia
California	Louisiana	Nevada	Oklahoma	Washington

States without current or planned high school exit exam policies

Connecticut	Kansas	Missouri	North Carolina	Utah
Delaware	Kentucky	Montana	North Dakota	West Virginia
Illinois	Maine	Nebraska	South Dakota	Wisconsin
Iowa	Michigan	New Hampshire	Tennessee	Wyoming

Descriptive statistics (such as total response counts and percentages) resulting from this survey were calculated and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, and the findings are discussed in chapter 2. The data were reviewed for errors, and state responses were clarified with survey participants when possible errors or discrepancies were found. Findings were also sent back to survey respondents prior to publication to enable them to verify the accuracy of the information.

Document Review

CEP also reviewed media reports and state policy documents that have been collected over the 11 years CEP has studied high school exit exams. We used open coding to identify common themes among these documents and selected specific state experiences to serve as examples of these common themes. We also reviewed past CEP studies on high school exit exams to provide additional information about what CEP has learned over the past 11 years.



Chapter 1: The Present Status of State High School Exit Exam Policies

This chapter gives a national snapshot of state high school exit exam policies in school year 2011-12, based on data collected through the verification process described in the Study Methods section earlier in this report. As the chapter makes clear, these policies vary from state to state and may change over time even in the same state. More specific information about exit exam policies for each state participating in this year's study can be found in the state profiles posted alongside this report at www.cep-dc.org.

This chapter describes the following characteristics of state exit exams:

- A list of states that currently have or are phasing in an exit exam requirement
- The number of students affected nationally by exit exam policies
- The types of exams administered
- The subjects and grade levels tested by exit exams
- Student passing rates on exit exams
- Options for students who fail exit exams
- Changes over the past year in exit exam policies

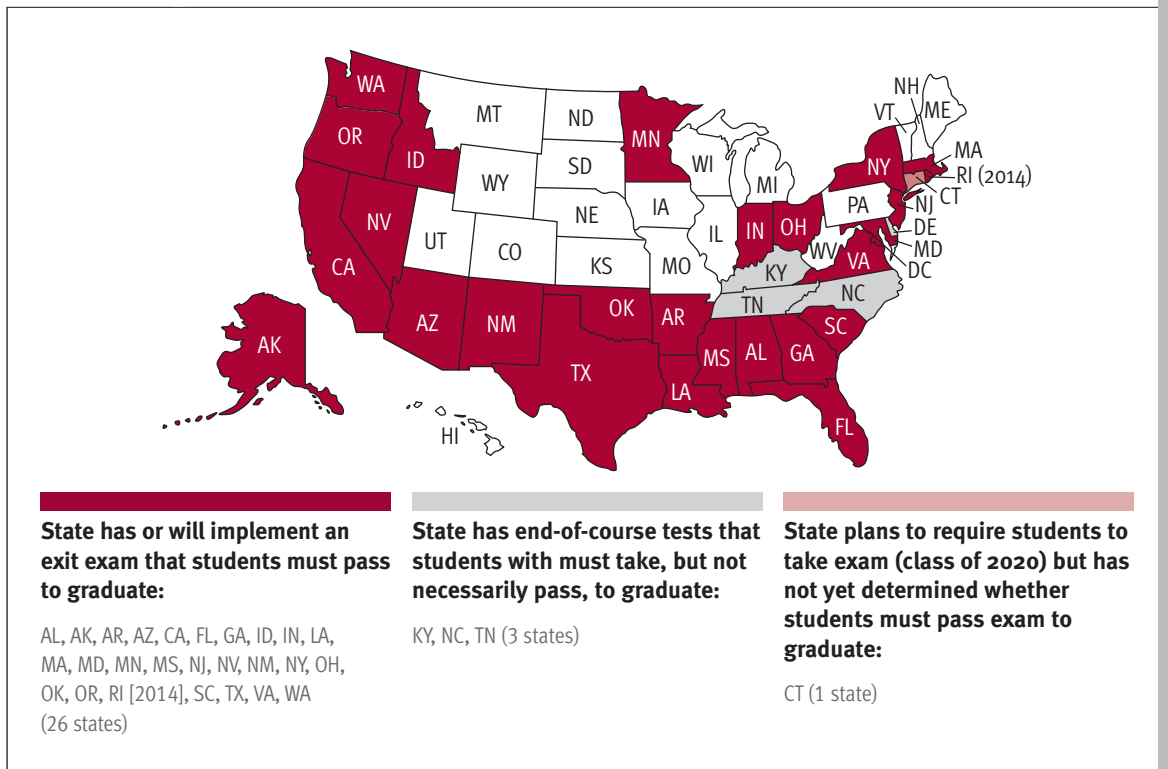
Which states have exit exams?

In the 2011-12 school year, 25 states required their students to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma. A 26th state, Rhode Island, intends to implement an exit exam requirement beginning with the class of 2014.

Figure 1-A shows which states administered exit exams in school year 2011-12. In two of these states, Oklahoma and Oregon, the graduating class of 2012 was the first group of students affected by the exit exam requirement. Rhode Island plans to implement an exit exam for the class of 2014.

Figure 1-A

Map of state high school exit exam policies, school year 2011-12



Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

To provide additional information about the changing landscape of exit exams, we also collected information this year from four states (Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee) that administer end-of-course assessments that do not meet our definition of “exit exams.” In three of these four states (Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee), students must take EOC assessments to receive credit for courses needed for graduation but are not necessarily required to pass the assessments to graduate. For example, in North Carolina and Tennessee, a student’s score on an EOC exam is factored into the final course grade, but the student could fail the exam and still pass the course required for graduation. Although these states are shown in figure 1-A, they are not included in the tallies of data that follow about subjects and grades tested and impacts on students.

Connecticut plans to require students to take EOC assessments beginning with the class of 2020, but state policymakers have not yet decided whether students must pass these exams to receive a high school diploma.

How many students are affected by exit exam policies?

Nearly 7 out of 10 students, and an even larger share of students of color, attend school in states with exit exams.

The 26 states that administer or are phasing in exit exams enroll 69% of the nation’s students. These states enroll an even larger majority of the nation’s students of color (71% of African American students and 85% of Hispanic students), low-income students (71%), and English language learners (83%), as displayed in **table 1-A**.

Table 1-A Number and percentage of students enrolled in school in states with high school exit exam policies

Student group	Number of students enrolled in school in exit exam states	Percentage of nation's students in exit exam states
All students	34,080,002	69%
African American	5,771,149	71%
Hispanic	9,229,730	85%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	15,861,517	71%
English language learners	3,918,322	83%

NOTE: The numbers in the second column are estimates based on state enrollment data for school year 2009-10, the most recent year reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. CEP calculated the percentages in the third column based on the 2009-10 enrollments of the states that had exit exam policies in 2011-12.

What are the main types of exit exams?

End-of-course exams continue to grow in popularity.

States administer two main types of exit exams—comprehensive and end-of-course exams. Comprehensive exams, sometimes referred to as “standards-based” exams, assess multiple subjects on the same test and are taken by all students at a particular grade level, usually grade 10 or 11 (CEP, 2008). For example, a comprehensive exam might be taken by all students for the first time in the spring of 10th grade and include content related to English, math, and science that students have been taught before or during 10th grade.

By contrast, end-of-course (EOC) exams are administered to students as they complete a specific course and assess mastery of the content for that course. For example, a state might require students, at the end of a school year, to take an EOC exam covering the content taught in an Algebra II course completed that year.

Currently 18 states are administering or plan to administer comprehensive exit exams (including Massachusetts, which administers both comprehensive and EOC exit exams):

- 17** states Required students in the class of 2012 to pass a comprehensive exit exam
Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Washington
- 1** state Phasing in a comprehensive exit exam requirement for the class of 2014
Rhode Island

EOC exams have become increasingly popular over the past decade, as noted in the 2011 CEP report, *State High School Tests: Changes in State Policies and the Impact of the College and Career Readiness Movement*.

This trend has continued in 2012. Nine states required students in the class of 2012 to pass EOC exams to graduate, including Massachusetts which required both comprehensive and EOC exit exams. This represents an increase from the two states that administered EOC exit exams in 2002. The popularity of EOC exams is even more apparent, however, if one also includes (a) states that currently require students to *take*, but not *pass*, EOC exams to graduate, and (b) states that are phasing in EOC exam requirements. By these criteria, 18 states altogether have current or planned policies for EOC exams:

8 states	Required students in the class of 2012 to pass EOC exams to graduate <i>Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, Virginia</i>
1 state	Administered both comprehensive and EOC exit exams for the class of 2012 <i>Massachusetts</i>
2 states	Administered a comprehensive exit exam in some subjects and also administered EOC exams that are not a graduation requirement in other subjects <i>Georgia, South Carolina</i>
1 state	Administered comprehensive exit exams for the class of 2012 and will administer both comprehensive and EOC exit exams for the class of 2013 <i>Washington State</i>
2 states	Administered comprehensive exit exams for the class of 2012 but are transitioning to EOC exit exams by 2015 <i>Florida, Texas</i>
3 states	Required students in the class of 2012 to take but not pass EOC exams to graduate <i>Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee</i>
1 state	Transitioning from a comprehensive exit exam for the class of 2012 to EOC exams for the class of 2015. Students will not have to pass EOC exams to graduate but instead exam scores will count for 20% of the grade in the corresponding course <i>Alabama</i>

Table 1-B lists all of the states with current or future exit exam policies, as well as the subjects tested on these exams.

Table 1-B

Types of high school exit exams and subjects tested in 2011-12

State	Type of high school exit exam	Subjects tested on high school exit exam	Additional comments
Alabama	Comprehensive*	Reading, language, math, biology, social studies	Transitioning from comprehensive to EOC exams; subjects yet to be determined; students will not have to pass EOC exams to graduate
Alaska	Comprehensive	Reading, writing, math	
Arizona	Comprehensive	Reading, writing, math	
Arkansas	End-of-course	Algebra I, English II (2015)	
California	Comprehensive	ELA, math	
Florida	Comprehensive [†]	Reading, math	Phasing in EOC exams in Algebra I, Biology I, Geometry
Georgia	Comprehensive	ELA, math, science, social studies, writing [†]	Also administers EOC exams in ELA, math, science, social studies courses; scores count for 15% or 20% of final course grade depending upon when a student entered high school
Idaho	Comprehensive	Reading, language usage, math	
Indiana	End-of-course	Algebra I, English 10	Also administers EOC exam in Biology that is not required for graduation
Louisiana	End-of-course	English II or English III, Algebra I or Geometry, and Biology or U.S. History	
Maryland	End-of-course	English 2, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology	
Massachusetts	Comprehensive and end-of-course	Comprehensive exam in ELA and math; EOC exam in Biology, Chemistry, Introductory Physics, or Technology/ Engineering	
Minnesota	Comprehensive	Math, reading, written composition	
Mississippi	End-of-course	Algebra I, English II, U.S. History, Biology I, Writing	
Nevada	Comprehensive	Math, reading, writing, science	

continues ►

State	Type of high school exit exam	Subjects tested on high school exit exam	Additional comments
New Jersey	Comprehensive	Language arts literacy, math	
New Mexico	Comprehensive	Reading, math	State collaborated with school districts to develop EOC exams in writing, science, social studies courses; districts set passing scores for graduation
New York	End-of-course	ELA, math, science, social studies courses	
Ohio	Comprehensive	Reading, writing, math, science, social studies	
Oklahoma	End-of-course	Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, English II, English III, Biology I, U.S. History	
Oregon	Comprehensive	Reading (2012), writing (2013), math (2014)	
Rhode Island	Comprehensive	Reading (2014), math (2014)	
South Carolina	Comprehensive	ELA, math	Administers EOC exams in Science and U.S. History and the Constitution that are not required for graduation
Texas	Comprehensive [†]	ELA, math, science, social studies	Phasing in EOC exams in English I, II, III; Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II; Biology, Chemistry, Physics; World Geography, World History, U.S. History
Virginia	End-of-course	Reading, Writing, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, World History to 1500, World History from 1500 to the Present, World Geography, Virginia/US History	
Washington	Comprehensive [†]	Reading, writing	Phasing in EOC exams in Algebra I, Geometry, Biology

NOTE: ELA = English language arts

*Alabama is transitioning from a comprehensive exit exam to end-of-course exams for the graduating class of 2015. Students will not have to pass the EOC exams to graduate, but scores from these exams will count for 20% of the course grade.

† Florida and Texas will transition to EOC exams for the class of 2015, which students must pass to graduate. Washington will transition to a combination of comprehensive and end-of-course exit exams for the graduating class of 2013.

‡ Georgia is phasing out its exit exams in ELA, math, science, and social studies beginning with the class of 2015, though the writing exam will remain an exit exam

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

Which subjects are tested on exit exams?

All 26 states with current or planned exit exam policies test students in English language arts, and most also test in mathematics. Several states, particularly those with end-of-course exams, assess additional subjects, usually science and/or social studies.

Whether they use comprehensive or EOC exams, all 25 states that administered exit exams in school year 2011-12 included some type of English language arts content—typically, reading and/or writing, or general language arts. A 26th state, Rhode Island, plans to test reading when its comprehensive exit exam is implemented in 2014.

All but two of these 25 states (Oregon and Washington State) also assess math on their exit exams. Although Georgia currently requires students to pass an exit exam in math, this requirement will change beginning with the class of 2015. At that time, students will be required to take EOC exams in math (as well as science and social studies), but will not be required to pass these exams to graduate; rather, exam scores will count for 20% of a student's final course grade. Oregon will include math in its comprehensive exit exam starting in 2014, while Washington is phasing in EOC exit exams in math and science for the class of 2013. In addition, Rhode Island plans to include math on its upcoming exit exam.

Some states that administered comprehensive exit exams in the 2011-12 school year assessed subjects beyond English language arts and math. Two states (Nevada and Washington) tested science content on their comprehensive exams, and four other states (Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, and Texas) included both science and social studies content.

States with EOC exams more frequently test students in subjects in addition to English language arts and math. Of the eight states that required students to pass an EOC exam in 2012, two (Arkansas and Indiana) limited these tests to English language arts and math courses. In addition to assessing English language arts and math, one of these eight states (Maryland) requires EOC exams in science courses, and the other five require EOC exams in both science and social studies courses.

It is possible that states with EOC exit exams test more subjects because they believe these kinds of assessments improve the connection between curriculum and instruction. Another possible explanation is that the courses students take branch out in high school, so there is less common instruction to test. Using EOC exams affords more flexibility to test the wide variety of course content taught at the high school level. This pattern could also be explained by the interest in some states to use test scores as a component of teacher evaluation. Some analysts contend that EOC exams more easily allow for connections between test scores and specific teachers, which makes them better suited for teacher evaluation purposes than other kinds of assessments (Domaleski, 2011). If incorporating test scores into teacher evaluations is a motivating factor in a state's decision to administer EOC exams, it makes sense to expand testing to subjects beyond English and math.

To which grade levels are exit exams aligned?

The majority of states with comprehensive exit exams test material taught through grade 10, although some states include material taught through grade 11 or 12. End-of-course exams are aligned to the content for a particular course rather than a specific grade level.

When states introduce comprehensive exit exams, they must decide on the grade level to which the content of the exams will be aligned. This decision significantly affects the difficulty of the exams. In 2002, when CEP first reported on high school exit exam policies, 10 states were administering minimum competency exams, which typically assess content covered before high school and are not very challenging for most students (CEP, 2002). As of 2012, the content tested on comprehensive exit exams can be described as follows:

11	states	Exit exams aligned to content taught <i>through</i> grade 10 <i>Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota (reading), Ohio, Rhode Island (2014), South Carolina, Washington</i>
7	states	Exit exams aligned to content taught <i>through</i> grade 11 <i>Alabama, Georgia, Minnesota (math), New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas</i>
1	state	Exit exams aligned to content taught <i>through</i> grade 12 <i>Nevada</i>

The data above suggest that comprehensive exit exams include more challenging content in 2012 than they did in 2002.

Because end-of-course exams, by definition, assess the content taught in a particular course, they are not aligned to a specific grade level. Students may take EOC exams at different grade levels, depending on when they have taken the corresponding course. Still, courses with EOC exams are typically required for high school graduation, so one can assume their content is aligned with a high school curriculum. Thus, the movement toward EOC assessments is another indicator that high school exit exams have increased in difficulty since 2002.

How many students pass exit exams?

The percentage of students who pass exit exams on the first try varies by state and by subject but generally ranges from 70 to 90%, with few exceptions.

Determining how many students pass high school exit exams is not as clear-cut as one might expect. States report different types of data; some states break down these data by students' ethnicity, income level, or other characteristics, while other states report no data on passing rates at all. Similarly, some states report the percentages of students that pass on their first attempt, while others report only the percentage that eventually pass after several opportunities to retake the exams, also known as "cumulative" passing rates. Cumulative passing rates may or may not include students who met this graduation requirement through one of the alternate routes described later in this chapter, such as taking a modified exam or being granted

an exemption. For these reasons, it is difficult to get a complete picture of how many students are ultimately denied a diploma because of their failure to pass an exit exam.

Initial passing rates are important because students who fail exit exams on the first try may have very different school experiences from those who pass, even if the students who fail the first time eventually pass the exam before graduation. For example, students who fail an exit exam are often taught a narrowed curriculum because they are assigned to remedial courses and other interventions that affect their learning opportunities. Initial passing rates also give an indication of how many students in each state may require remediation or other interventions that add to the expense of exit exam policies.

Table 1-C shows state-by-state data on the percentage of students that passed state exit exams on the first try in the most recent year with data. For most states, these data are from the 2010-11 school year.

Table 1-C		Percentages of students passing state exit exams on the first attempt					
State	Year diplomas first withheld	Reading	ELA	Writing	Math	Science	Social studies
Alabama	2001	83%	78%		85%	94%	71%
Alaska	2004	83%		71%	77%		
Arizona	2006	80%		70%	60%		
Arkansas*	2013				Not yet available		
California	2006		83%		84%		
Florida	2003	50%			58%		
Georgia	1995		91%	98%	87%	92%	82%
Idaho†	2006	97%	91%		91%		
Indiana	2012		74%		74%		
Louisiana†	2003		86%		84%	86%	87%
Maryland	2009		75%		81%	75%	
Massachusetts	2003		97%		93%	93%	
Minnesota†	2010	80%		92%	58%		
Mississippi	2003 U.S. History 2004 English II 2005 Biology I 2006 Algebra I		72%		85%	73%	93%
Nevada	2003	54%		79%	54%	57%	
New Jersey			90%		75%		

continues ➤

State	Year diplomas first withheld	Reading	ELA	Writing	Math	Science	Social studies
New Mexico*	2013	Not yet available			Not yet available		
New York [†]	2000		NA		NA	NA	NA
Ohio [†]	2007	86%		88%	83%	77%	82%
Oklahoma	2012		87% Eng. II 84% Eng. III		82% Alg. I 67% Alg. II 78% Geom.	80%	78%
Oregon	2012	83%					
Rhode Island	2014	92%			56%		
South Carolina	2004		89%		82%		
Texas			93%		91%	94%	98%
Virginia [§]	2004		88%	89%	87%	90%	84%
Washington	2008	83%		86%			

NOTE: ELA = English language arts

NOTE: The table includes passing rates only for subjects required for graduation.

*Data were not publicly available at the time of CEP's study but will be released later.

[†]Louisiana's reported passing rates for science and social studies and Ohio's passing rates in all subjects are for school year 2011-12.

[‡]Initial passing rates are not available for New York; this state reports only cumulative passing rates, which include students who passed the exit exam after multiple attempts. See New York's profile at www.cep-dc.org for more information.

[§]Virginia's pass rates may include students who failed an exit exam but immediately retook and passed it within the same school year.

Source: Center on Education Policy, *exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012*.

It is important to remember that state passing rates may differ for reasons other than a state's educational quality or the relative achievement of its students. Passing rates are not comparable across states because, as previously discussed, state exit exams vary a great deal in the content they test, their difficulty, and other aspects. Moreover, the amount of time an exit exam has been in effect can also affect passing rates because students and teachers become more familiar with the exam's format, content, and expectations after an exam has been in place for a few years (CEP, 2002). Linn (2000) notes that passing rates on exit exams typically increase more rapidly during the first few years after a new testing requirement has been introduced, then level off after the program has been in place for several years. Finally, a change in the passing score on a specific exit exam is likely to impact initial passing rates. The state profiles that accompany this report online at www.cep-dc.org contain additional information about how to access both initial and cumulative passing rates for each state.

What options are available for students who do not pass exit exams?

States offer various opportunities for students who do not pass exit exams on the first try, including opportunities to retake the exam and alternate paths to meeting graduation requirements. More specific information about each state and their alternate routes to graduation can be found in the state profiles that accompany this report online at www.cep-dc.org, as well as in CEP's 2009 report, *State High School Exit Exams: Trends in Test Programs, Alternate Pathways, and Pass Rates*.

All states that administered exit exams in 2011-12 provided students who fail these exams on the first attempt with opportunities to retake them before the end of 12th grade. The number of retake opportunities varies from state to state.

Most states offer students between four and six retake opportunities before the end of 12th grade, but the specific number ranges from as few as two in Rhode Island to as many as twelve in Maryland and Oregon.

These variations in the number of retake opportunities are partly a result of logistical considerations, such as when students are first tested. For example, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, and Virginia offer students three or four opportunities per year to retake an end-of-course assessment, but the actual number of opportunities depends on the grade during which a student first takes an end-of-course exam.

In addition to allowing retakes before the end of 12th grade, all 26 states with current or planned exit exams offer students numerous opportunities to retake exit exams after they have finished the coursework required for high school completion. In fact, nearly all of these 26 states provide young people with an unlimited number of opportunities to continue to take exit exams after 12th grade. Maryland specifies, however, that the individual must still be enrolled in a Maryland public school, while Oregon limits retake opportunities after high school to students who are age 19 or younger, except for students with disabilities, who may take the test though age 21.

Twenty-two of the 26 states with current or planned exit exams offer alternate paths to graduation for general education students who fail the state exit exam, but specific options and requirements vary greatly from state to state.

Four states (Alabama, Alaska, South Carolina, and Texas) provided no alternate paths to graduation in 2011-12 for general education students (as opposed to alternate paths intended particularly for special education students). The other states with exit exam policies offer one or more of the following routes to graduation for general education students who do not pass these exams:

- 12 states** Allow students to take an alternative assessment or substitute scores from another assessment, such as the ACT or SAT
Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington
- 8 states** Permit students to use portfolios of coursework or end-of-course projects to demonstrate their knowledge in lieu of passing an exit exam
Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington
- 7 states** Offer waivers or appeals of exit exam requirements, typically after students have made repeated attempts to pass an exit exam and have met other requirements related to attendance, remediation, and/or grade point average
Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota (math only), New York, Ohio, Rhode Island
- 3 states** Give students who fail exit exams an opportunity to earn an alternate diploma, such as a certificate of completion (which is not always equivalent to a regular diploma)
California, Louisiana, Virginia

The eligibility criteria and other requirements for these alternate paths vary greatly from state to state, as do the numbers and percentages of students using these options. For example, Arkansas and Mississippi both allow general education students to meet state exit exam requirements by taking a different assessment or substituting scores from another assessment, but their requirements differ considerably. Arkansas allows scores to be substituted from the SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams for students who meet or exceed a requisite score set by the state board of education on one of these assessments. Nevertheless, Arkansas officials reported that no students used this alternate route during school year 2010-11, the most recent year with data. Mississippi allows students who fail an EOC exam by one scale point on three separate occasions to submit an appeal to take the state-developed alternative assessment that relies on other evidence to demonstrate their mastery of the subject. To be eligible for this option, Mississippi recommends that these students participate in remediation designed to assist them in passing the appropriate EOC test, but the remediation is not a requirement. In the 2010-11 school year, 22 students took Mississippi's alternative assessment.

Only three states provide alternate paths to graduation designed specifically for English language learners who fail exit exams. These options are available only to students who have been in the U.S. for a limited number of years.

Although the alternate paths for general education students described above are also offered to English language learners, states offer very few options specifically for ELLs. Testing accommodations, such as translation dictionaries, extra testing time, and assessments in native languages, appear to be the most common form of testing supports available to ELLs. According to data reported by states for school year 2011-12, just three states make exceptions to their exit exam requirements for students who have been in the country a limited amount of time. In Texas, students living in the U.S. for fewer than 12 months can defer the exit exam requirement, but they may use this deferment option just once. Minnesota allows ELLs to file for an exemption to the state's exit exam requirement if they have been living in the country for fewer than four years. Oregon gives school districts the option of allowing ELLs living in the country for fewer than five years to meet the exit exam requirement using locally developed assessments in place of state assessments.

Twenty-two of the 26 states with current or planned exit exams provide alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities. The most common options include allowing students with disabilities to take alternate or modified assessments or to seek a waiver or appeal of the exit exam requirement.

In school year 2011-12, only four states with current or planned exit exams (Idaho, Oregon, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) provided no alternate routes to graduation specifically for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who fail exit exams in Idaho, Oregon, and Rhode Island can still take advantage of the alternate paths available to all students in those states.

In the 22 states that do provide options for students with disabilities to meet graduation requirements other than passing an exit exam, the alternate paths are similar to those available to general education students. Some states offer more than one of these options:

- 14 states** Allow students to take an alternate or modified assessment
Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington
- 8 states** Give students who fail exit exams an opportunity to earn an alternate diploma, such as a certificate of completion (which is not always equivalent to a regular diploma)
Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio
- 8 states** Offer waivers or appeals of exit exam requirements
Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, New Jersey, Ohio
- 4 states** Permit students to use portfolios of coursework or end-of-course projects to demonstrate their knowledge in lieu of passing an exit exam
Alaska, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma

The requirements for these alternate paths for students with disabilities differ by state, as do the number and percentage of students using them. For example, Washington State allows students receiving special education in grades 11 and 12 to take its Developmentally Appropriate Proficiency Exam (DAPE) if specified by their individualized education program (IEP) team. The DAPE is the state's general assessment for grade spans below high school; students take the assessment for either grades 3-5 or grades 6-8, as specified by their IEP team. Washington officials reported that in school year 2010-11, the most recent year with data, 1,402 students took the reading DAPE, 642 took the writing DAPE, and 2,491 took the math DAPE. By comparison, students with disabilities in Nevada can meet the exit exam requirement by taking the high school exit exam for general education students but with accommodations approved by their IEP team. In the 2010-11 school year, 1,215 students in Nevada used this option for the writing requirement, 1,139 for reading, 1,424 for science, and 1,963 for math.

How have state exit exam policies changed over the past year?

Several states have revised their exit exam policies during the past year or so. Some of these are general policy changes made for political, educational, or other reasons, while others are changes made specifically in response to funding reductions.

During the past year, four states have eliminated or decided to phase out their exit exam policies.

As explained in CEP's 2011 report, some states with longstanding exit exam policies have moved away from requiring students to pass an exam to receive a high school diploma. Tennessee made this change for school year 2009-10 and North Carolina for school year 2010-11. Alabama will eliminate its exit exam requirement beginning with the graduating class of 2015. All three states are transitioning to new end-of-course assessments.

A fourth state, Georgia, began phasing out its exit exam requirement for all subjects except writing in 2011-12, but Georgia students will still have to pass a writing assessment to graduate. (Georgia has administered EOC exams since 2003).

All four of these states will still require students to take, but not necessarily pass, EOC exams to graduate; instead these states have decided that scores from these exams will account for a portion (15-25%) of a students' final grade in the corresponding course.

According to Alabama officials, this policy change is a result of Alabama's decision to transition to one of the common assessment systems being developed by two state consortia (PARCC and SMARTER Balanced). These common assessments, which will be aligned with the Common Core State Standards, may also have been a factor in the policy changes in other states. Chapter 3 contains a further discussion of common assessments and their relationship to state policy changes.

States that are continuing to administer exit exams reported making some changes in exam policies over the past year.

State officials participating in our study reported the following changes in exit exam policies over the past year:

- **Implementation of new exams.** Mississippi implemented a new (2nd edition) U.S. History EOC exam, which students are required to pass for graduation. Virginia implemented new EOC exams in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II, which are based on new content standards adopted by the Virginia Board of Education in 2009.
- **Setting new cut scores to reflect college readiness.** Florida established new cut scores for its grade 10 FCAT 2.0 reading assessment and its Algebra 1 end-of-course assessment; the new cut scores are intended to indicate that a student is likely to be ready for college by the time he or she graduates from high school. The Virginia Board of Education adopted an "advanced/college path" cut score for its new Algebra II exam to replace the "advanced" achievement level on its old Algebra II test; the new cut score is intended to indicate that students are academically ready for college.

- **Elimination of alternative assessment for students with disabilities.** New York discontinued its Regents Competency Test (RCT) for students with disabilities. Previously, students with disabilities could substitute an RCT for the corresponding Regents exam as long as they attempted the Regents exam, but this option is no longer available, beginning with students who entered 9th grade in school year 2011-12. State officials emphasized that the RCT, which was first adopted more than a decade ago, was intended to be a temporary measure until districts had revised their instructional programs to provide students with disabilities with full access to the state's general education standards.
- **Delayed implementation.** Connecticut delayed its implementation of a possible exit exam policy by two years; the graduating class of 2020 will now be the first group of students impacted by this policy.

In response to state budget cuts, several states have eliminated certain exit exams, reduced retake opportunities, or made other changes in exit exam policies.

States participating in our study reported making the following changes for financial reasons:

- **Elimination of some state exams.** New Mexico replaced the state exit exams in science, writing, and social studies with end-of-course assessments developed by local school districts. New Mexico will continue to administer its comprehensive exit exam in reading and math but has reduced the opportunities for students to retake the exam to once during their senior year. New York dropped its requirement for students to take a state-administered foreign language exam to obtain a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation; students must instead pass a locally developed exam. Maryland eliminated funding for its High School Assessment in government after the May 2011 administration, but funding for this exam was restored in the fiscal year 2013 budget.
- **Fewer opportunities to retake exams.** In response to state budget cuts, the Louisiana Department of Education removed the February opportunity for high school seniors to retake the state's exit exam for school years 2010–11 through 2012–13. Oregon also reduced the number of retake opportunities on the state's exit exam in writing from one annual test opportunity for each of the four years of high school to a single retake during 11th grade for 2011-12 and 2012-13. This change will impact students who entered 9th grade during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.
- **Fewer samples required for portfolio option.** Oregon reduced the number of student work samples required for students who use portfolios of their work to meet the exit exam requirement in writing.

In addition to these revisions, states are making other changes in their exit exam policies as part of the movement to refocus standards and assessments on college and career readiness rather than on just competence in a high school curriculum. The next chapter describes findings from a CEP survey of officials in 45 states, 25 of which have current or planned high school exit exams, about future changes in exit exam policies related to implementation of the Common Core State Standards and/or common assessments and other emerging issues.



Chapter 2: The Future of State High School Exit Exams

State high school assessment policies are at a crossroads. As of September 2012, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math that were developed with leadership from state governors and chief state school officers. (Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia have not adopted the CCSS in either subject, and Minnesota has adopted them in English language arts but not math.) Most states are also participating in one or both of the two state consortia that are developing common assessments aligned to the CCSS. To date, 23 states belong to the PARCC consortium, and 27 states are participating in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

In addition, many education stakeholders have advocated for states to assess students' college and career readiness rather than just their competence in a high school curriculum. Consistent with this goal, the CCSS have been designed to reflect the knowledge and skills young people will need for success in college and careers. And the Obama Administration has made the adoption of college- and career-readiness standards and assessments a priority for competitive grants under the federal Race to the Top program and a condition for receiving waivers of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.

These developments, which generally represent a move toward more rigorous high school standards and assessments, are affecting a variety of policies both in states with high school exit exams and those with other types of high school assessments. In exit exam states, policymakers must decide, for example, whether to revise or replace their current exit exams to meet college- and career-readiness standards, whether consortia-developed assessments can be used for the same purposes as their current exit exams, and whether to require students to pass an exam aligned to more rigorous college and career expectations in order to graduate.

To shed light on these and other issues affecting the future of state high school assessment policies, CEP conducted a special survey of state education department personnel in the summer of 2012. As noted in the Study Methods section at the beginning of this report, responses to this survey were received from 25 states with current or planned exit exams and 20 states that do not have exit exam policies.

This chapter describes findings from the special survey on the following topics:

- ▶ The purposes of exit exams
- ▶ The alignment of exit exams with college- and career-readiness standards
- ▶ The use of results from exit exams by postsecondary institutions
- ▶ State policies requiring high school students to take college entrance exams, such as the SAT and ACT
- ▶ The impact of the CCSS on exit exam policies

For most of the topics above, the discussion is limited to the 25 responding states with current or planned exit exams. The exception is the discussion of policies to require high school students to take college entrance exams, which includes information from the 45 states responding to the special survey.

What are the purposes of exit exams in states with these policies?

Assessing the extent to which students have mastered state standards and curriculum is the most common reason states cite for requiring students to take exit exams.

Officials in states with exit exam policies were asked why their state requires or will require students to take (as opposed to pass) an exam to receive a high school diploma. Survey participants could select more than one answer from a list of possible responses or add their own response.

The most common reason cited by state officials for requiring students to take exit exams was to assess the extent to which students have mastered the state standards and curriculum. As shown in **figure 2-A**, officials in 22 of the 25 responding states with exit exam policies said this was a purpose of their exams. Other popular responses included assessing the extent to which students have attained the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a career (14 of 25 states) and assessing the extent to which students have attained the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education (14 states).

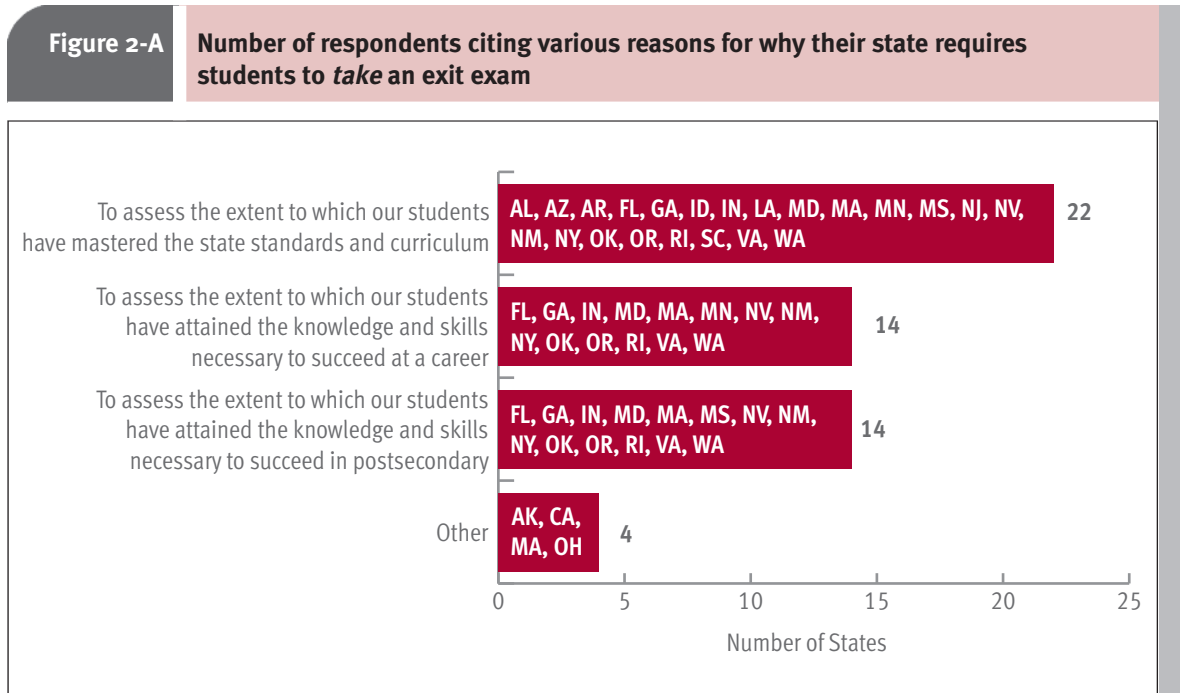


Figure reads: Officials in 22 of the 25 responding states with high school exit exam policies said their state requires students to take an exit exam to assess the extent to which students have mastered the state standards and curriculum.

NOTE: States could give more than one response.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

States require students to *pass* exit exams to attribute greater meaning to a high school diploma and ensure graduates are prepared for college and careers, among other reasons.

Officials in states with exit exam policies were also asked why their state requires or will require high school students to pass an exam to graduate. States could choose more than one response from a list of reasons (which were different from the reasons for requiring students to take exit exams) or add their own response. As shown in **figure 2-B**, the most common responses were to attribute greater meaning or significance to a high school diploma (15 of the 25 responding states with exit exams) and to ensure students who receive a high school diploma are ready for college and/or a career (12 states). The number of states citing college and career readiness as a purpose for their exit exam policies has increased since 2004—the year CEP first asked states about the purpose of their exit exam policies—when only one state (Georgia) specifically noted that its exit exam was intended for this purpose. Respondents in 8 states said this requirement was implemented in response to advocacy from certain education stakeholders, such as local business leaders, while officials in 6 states said this requirement is intended to motivate students to perform their best on the state assessments.

Figure 2-B Number of respondents citing various reasons for why their state requires students to *pass* an exit exam to graduate

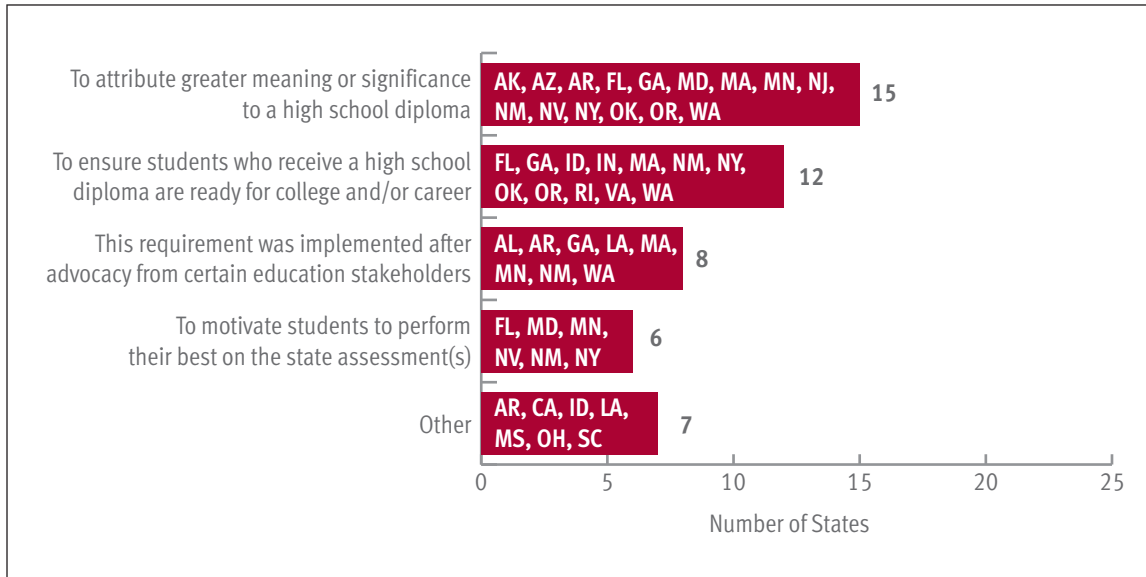


Figure reads: Fifteen of the 25 responding states with high school exit exam policies said their state requires students to pass exit exams to attribute greater meaning or significance to a high school diploma.

NOTE: States could give more than one response.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

Are exit exams aligned to standards for college and career readiness?

Most states with exit exams policies have not yet aligned these exams to college- and career-readiness standards, but many are planning to do so.

Because of the emphasis placed on assessing students' college and career readiness by the Administration's ESEA flexibility initiative, Race to the Top program, and other inducements, we asked officials in the 25 responding states with exit exam policies whether their exams are aligned to content standards that they believe indicate students' readiness for college and/or careers. Just 8 of these 25 respondents answered "yes," as shown in **figure 2-C**. Officials in 10 additional states said their state plans to realign their current exit exams to college- and career-readiness standards in the near future. Officials in 7 states said their exit exams are not aligned to college- and career-readiness standards, nor does their state plan to make this change in the near future.

Figure 2-C

Number of states reporting that their high school exit exams are aligned to college- and career-readiness standards

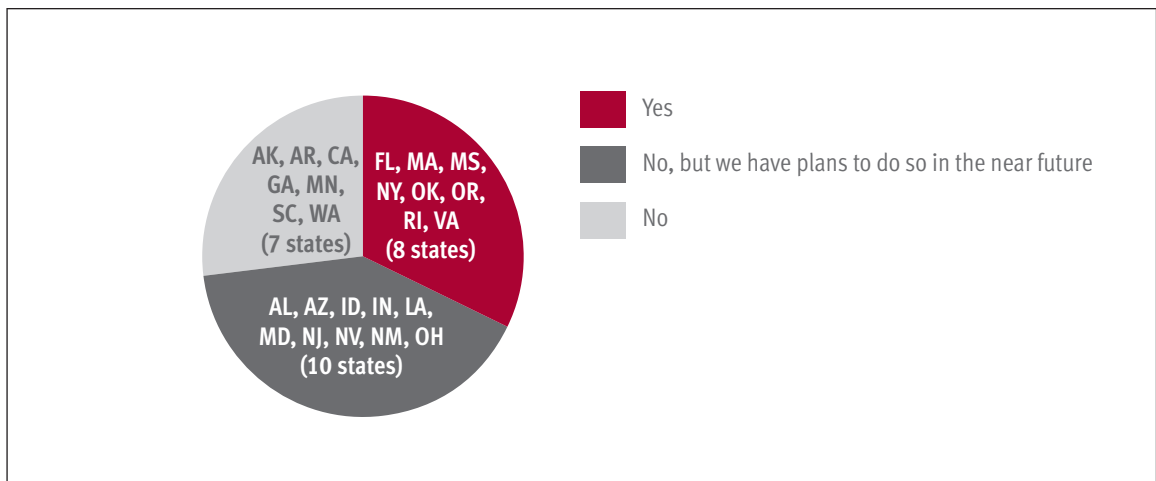


Figure reads: Eight of the 25 responding states with exit exam policies—including Florida, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Virginia—reported that their states' exit exams are aligned to college- and career-readiness standards.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

Most states that are aligning their exit exams to college- and career-readiness standards are using the Common Core State Standards, state-specific standards, or a combination of both for this purpose.

As a follow-up, we asked the 18 states that reported their exit exams were aligned or would soon be aligned to college and career readiness standards to describe which standards their state was using for this purpose. States were given four response options—the CCSS, content standards developed specifically for their state, postsecondary entry-level standards, or postsecondary course standards—as well as the option of adding their own response. States could choose all responses that applied.

The responses can be grouped as follows:

States that gave just one response:

7 states Aligning exit exams to the CCSS
Alabama, Arizona, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey

4 states Aligning exit exams to state-specific content standards
Louisiana, Oregon, Rhode Island, New Mexico

States that chose multiple responses:

5 states Aligning exit exams to both the CCSS and state-specific content standards
Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma

1 state Aligning exit exams to the CCSS, postsecondary entry-level standards, *and* postsecondary course standards
Florida

1 state Aligning exit exams to state-specific content standards, postsecondary entry-level standards, *and* postsecondary course standards
Virginia

The fact that several states chose more than one response raises questions about how states are applying different sets of standards and suggests that some issues of alignment are still unsettled. It is not clear, for example, why several states reported aligning their exit exams to both the CCSS and state content standards. These states may be aligning their exit exams in English language arts and math to the CCSS and using state-developed standards for other subjects, but it is also possible states are combining elements of different content standards. It could also be that some states have conducted alignment studies and found that their state standards are aligned with the CCSS. Virginia has not adopted the CCSS, which helps to explain why it is aligning its exit exam to some combination of state-specific standards, postsecondary entry-level standards, and postsecondary course standards.

Do postsecondary institutions use student scores on exit exams?

Very few states with exit exam policies report that scores from these exams are used by postsecondary education institutions for admission, placement, or scholarship decisions.

Although some states have made progress in aligning their high school exit exams with college- and career-readiness standards, it appears that scores from exit exams are seldom used by postsecondary institutions for important decisions. We asked the 25 responding states with exit exam policies whether public or private colleges and universities or community colleges in their state use exit exam results for decisions about admissions, course placement, or scholarships. Few states reported these types of postsecondary uses. It is important to note, however, that in several states the survey respondents, who represented state elementary and secondary education departments, did not have this information.

In regards to college admissions, none of the 25 respondents from exit exam states explicitly reported that higher education institutions use exit exam results for undergraduate admission decisions. Respondents in eight of these 25 states did not have this information. Seventeen states specifically reported that their exit exams are *not* used for admissions by public or private colleges and universities or by community colleges.

An official from Oregon provided a more detailed response which clarified that although the state's post-secondary institutions do not use "proficient" (passing) scores on exit exams for admissions decisions, some institutions do use *higher* cut scores on these exams as a factor in admissions. Beginning with students applying in the fall of 2012, the Oregon University System (OUS) will grant automatic admission to its member universities for students who reach OUS-designated cut scores in all three subjects of the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) and also meet a minimum high school grade point average. The OAKS tests reading, writing, and mathematics and is one of a menu of assessments Oregon students may use to meet the state's exit exam requirement.

In the area of course placement, Georgia was the only state to answer "yes" to the question of whether post-secondary institutions use exit exam results for placement decisions. The Georgia respondent explained that some of the state's colleges and universities allow students who have achieved the Advanced Proficiency or Honors level¹ on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) to enroll in credit-bearing classes without additional testing and without having to take remedial classes. Ten other states, including Florida, said that their postsecondary institutions do not use exit exam results in course placement, while 11 state respondents did not have this information. The respondent from Florida clarified, however, that students who reach achievement level 3²—the passing score for graduation purposes—on the grade 10 FCAT 2.0 reading test do not receive any special consideration in course placement at the Florida College System. However, students who score within level 4 or 5 on the grade 10 FCAT and enroll in a Florida College System institution within two years are exempt from taking the state postsecondary readiness test, which is typically used to place entering undergraduates in reading, writing, and mathematics courses of the appropriate skill level.

In regards to scholarships, respondents from three states (Arizona, Massachusetts, and Nevada) said that all public universities and colleges in their state consider student performance on the state's exit exam when making decisions about student scholarships. The respondent from Massachusetts explained that public universities and colleges grant tuition waivers for students who score in the top quartile for their district on the state exit exam. Respondents from Massachusetts and Nevada said this was also true for community colleges in their states. Nine states said that their postsecondary institutions did not use exit exam results for scholarship decisions, while 11 state respondents did not have this information.

Which states require high school students to take college entrance exams?

Nine states have policies requiring students to take a college entrance exam, and three more states are considering adopting such a requirement. Most of these 12 states do not administer high school exit exams.

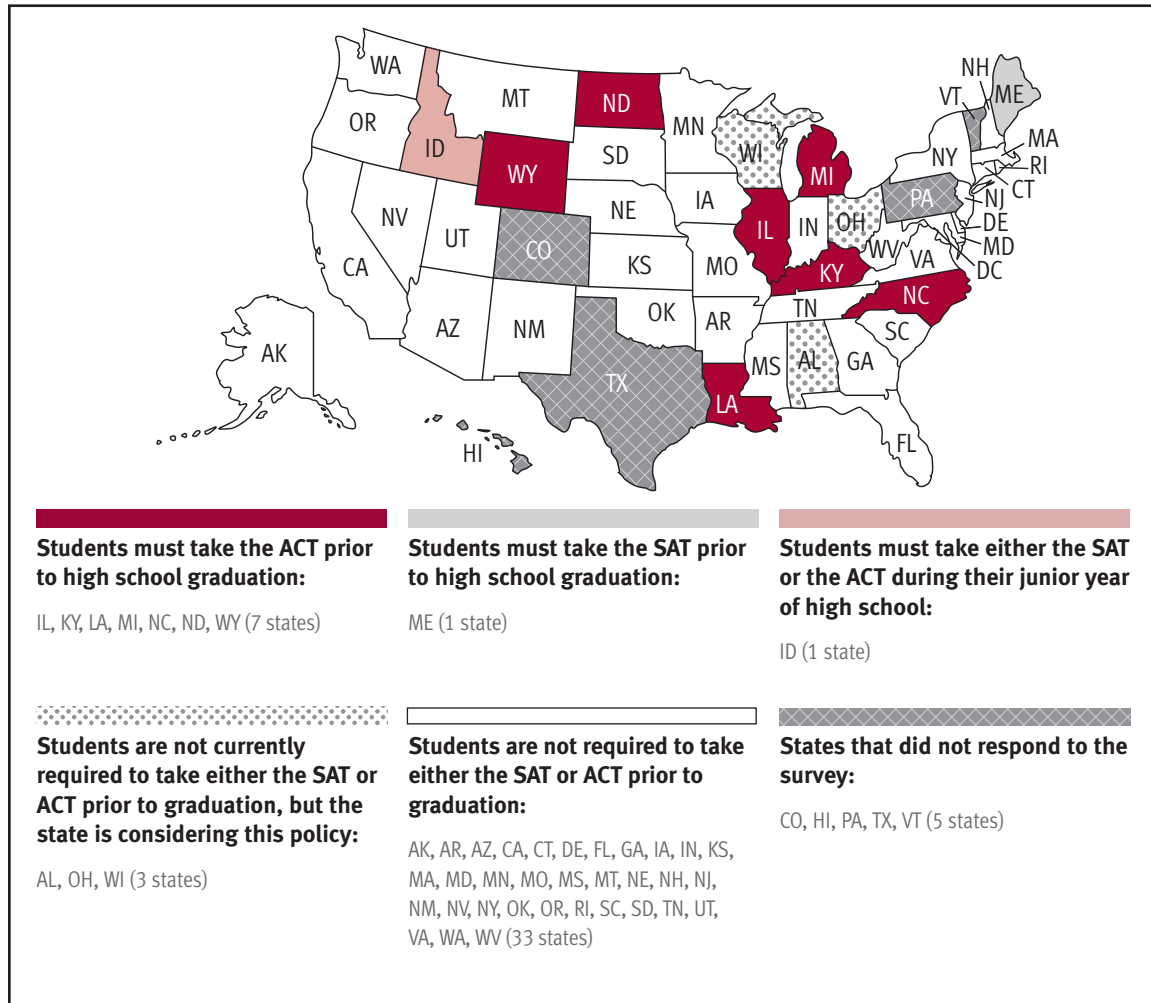
In addition to targeting several questions on the 25 responding states with high school exit exam policies, our special survey included questions directed to all 45 responding states about the use of college entrance exams, such as the SAT and ACT, at the high school level.

¹ The GHS GT has four performance levels: Below Proficiency, Basic Proficiency, Advanced Proficiency, and Honors.

² The grade 10 FCAT has five achievement levels: level 1 (inadequate), level 2 (below satisfactory), level 3 (satisfactory), level 4 (above satisfactory), and level 5 (mastery of the most challenging content). See <http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcat2/pdf/s12uf2r.pdf> for more information.

Of the 45 responding states, 7 states (Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Wyoming) require all students to take the ACT before they graduate from high school, as shown in **figure 2-D**. One state (Maine) requires all high school students to take the SAT prior to graduation, and another state (Idaho) requires students to take either the SAT or the ACT. None of these states, however, requires students to achieve a certain “passing” score on a college entrance exam to obtain a high school diploma.

Figure 2-D State policies for requiring high school students to take college entrance exams, 2011-12



Three additional states (Alabama, Ohio, and Wisconsin) are considering policies that would require students to take a college entrance exam prior to high school graduation.

These findings reveal an interesting pattern—namely, most states that have or are considering a policy to require high school students to take college entrance exams do not administer high school exit exams. Only Louisiana currently requires high school students to take a college entrance exam in addition to taking an exit exam. Two of the states that are considering implementing college entrance exam policies (Alabama and Ohio) also have high school exit exams, but respondents in both states said that the proposed college entrance exams may replace their states’ exit exams. It is possible that state policymakers view both college

entrance exam policies and exit exam requirements as serving similar purposes, such as assessing postsecondary readiness, and may choose one or the other rather than implementing both. The exit exam requirements, however, have more serious consequences for students than the college entrance exam requirements because diplomas can be withheld from students who fail exit exams.

How are the Common Core State Standards affecting exit exam policies?

Several questions in the special survey dealt with the impact of the CCSS and related common assessments on high school exit exams in states that have or are phasing in exit exams. As discussed above, many states wish to assess students' readiness for college and careers, and some see the CCSS and common assessments as the next step in achieving that goal. Twenty-two of the 25 responding states with exit exam policies have adopted the CCSS in both English language arts and math. Minnesota has adopted the CCSS in English language arts only, and Alaska and Virginia have not adopted them in either subject.

Many exit exam states that have adopted the CCSS intend to maintain their requirement for students to pass exit exams in English language arts and math.

Of the 22 responding states that have exit exam policies *and* have adopted the CCSS in both subjects, 14 states reported that they plan to maintain their current requirement for students to pass an exam in English language arts and math to receive a high school diploma. Officials in six states said they do not know how the CCSS will impact their exit exam requirement. **Figure 2-E** shows states' responses about their future exit exam plans.

A respondent from one of the 22 CCSS-adopting states with exit exams (Alabama) said that the state is discontinuing its exit exam requirement as a result of the CCSS and instead plans to implement the PARCC end-of-course assessments. Rather than requiring students to pass the new EOC exams, Alabama will count

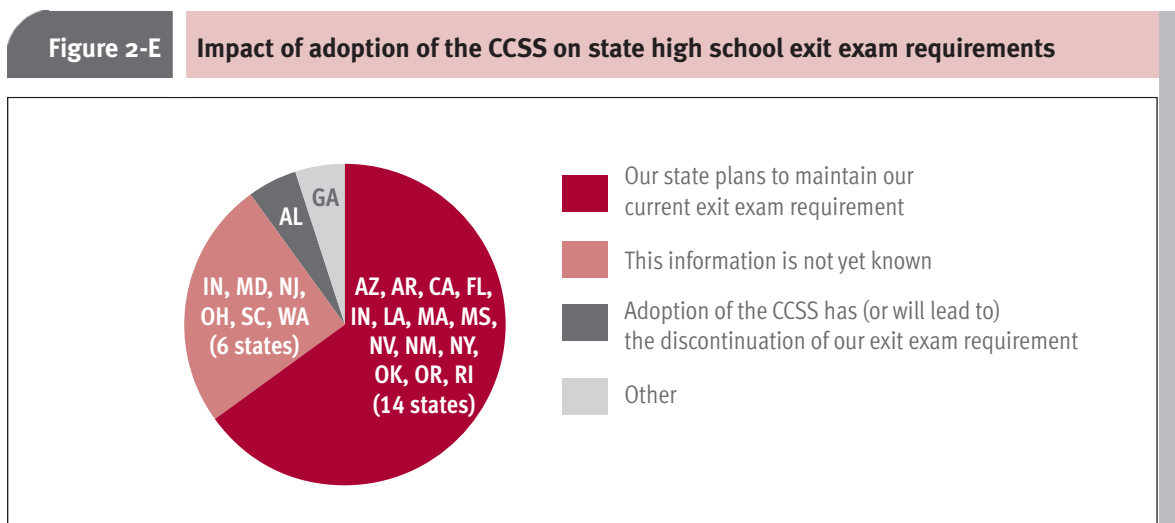


Figure reads: Of the 22 states that have high school exit exam policies and have adopted the CCSS in English language arts and math, 14 reported that their state plans to maintain its exit exam requirement even with adoption of the CCSS.

NOTE: Three responding states with exit exam policies (Alaska, Minnesota and Virginia) are not shown in the figure because they have not adopted the CCSS in both subjects.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, May 2012.

scores on these exams as a percentage of students' final course grades. An official from another state (Georgia) explained that the State Board of Education was already developing a policy to phase out its exit exam requirement when it decided to implement the CCSS and common assessments. Georgia will include performance on its end-of-course exams as a percentage of students' final course grades beginning with the class of 2015, rather than requiring students to pass them in order to graduate.

Most exit exam states that have adopted the CCSS plan to replace their current exit exams in English language arts and math with a new assessment aligned to the common standards.

Officials in 18 of the 22 responding states that have exit exam policies and have also adopted the CCSS in English language arts and math said their state plans to replace its current exit exam in both subjects with new assessments aligned to the CCSS. Respondents in 2 of these 21 states did not yet know their plans. The remaining two states gave unique responses. The specific responses from these 22 states can be grouped as follows:

- 13 states** Plan to replace their current exit exams in both subjects with PARCC assessments
Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island
- 3 states** Plan to replace their current exit exams in both subjects with SMARTER Balanced assessments
Idaho, Nevada, Oregon
- 2 states** Plan to replace their current exit exams in both subjects with new state assessments aligned to CCSS
Alabama, New York (in New York, this could be the PARCC assessments, pending approval from the state's Board of Regents)
- 2 states** Did not yet know whether they would replace their current exit exams in either subject with CCSS-aligned assessments
South Carolina, Washington
- 1 state** Plans to continue administering its current exit exams in both subjects rather than replacing them with CCSS-aligned assessments
California
- 1 state** Already phasing out exit exam requirement when the state adopted the CCSS; will continue administering current exam until phase-out is complete
Georgia

An official from Minnesota, which has adopted the CCSS in English language arts but not in math, also responded to this question. For now, Minnesota plans to continue administering its current exit exam rather than using a CCSS-aligned assessment in English language arts; however, at the time of publication a state committee was meeting to address the future of high school exit exams.

Appendix A located online at www.cep-dc.org consists of a table with more detail about the impact of the CCSS in the responding states with exit exam policies.

A large majority of states that plan to replace their current exit exams with CCSS-aligned assessments expect their new assessments to be more rigorous than the current ones.

Because many states plan to replace their current high school exit exams with new assessments aligned to the CCSS, we asked states whether these changes would make their new exit exams more rigorous, less rigorous, or about as rigorous as their current ones.

Of the 18 states with current exit exam policies that plan to replace their exams with CCSS-aligned assessments, 15 expect the new assessments to be more rigorous in both subjects; these include Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Two state respondents (Mississippi and Oregon) expected the new exams to be more rigorous in math but about the same in English language arts, and an additional respondent (Rhode Island) did not yet know whether the state's new assessments would be more or less rigorous.

Appendix A located online at www.cep-dc.org includes more information about the expected rigor of the new assessments in the responding states with exit exam policies.

In exit exam states that have adopted the CCSS, plans vary about whether to replace exit exams in subjects *other than* English language arts and math.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many states with high school exit exam policies require students to pass exams in additional subjects beyond English language arts and math, typically science and/or social studies. For this reason, our special survey asked CCSS-adopting states with current or future exit exams in additional subjects whether they intend to maintain these subject exams once the CCSS have been fully implemented. Their responses were mixed:

- 9 states** Plan to maintain their exit exams in subjects other than English language arts (ELA) and math
Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Washington
- 3 states** Plan to discontinue their exit exams in subjects *other than* ELA and math
Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana
- 2 states** Do not yet know if they will maintain their exit exams in subjects *other than* ELA and math
New Jersey, Ohio

Alaska and Virginia have not adopted the CCSS. The remaining exit exam states that responded to the survey do not currently require exit exams in additional subjects.

What are some implications of these trends in exit exams?

States are shifting how they use or plan to use high school exit exams, as indicated by the number of states that cited assessment of students' college and career readiness as a purpose of their exit exams and the number that are aligning these exams to college- and career-readiness standards. When CEP first began asking states about the purpose of their exit exam policies in 2004, only one state (Georgia) specifically noted that its exit exam was intended to certify that students were prepared to enter the workforce or college. By contrast, many more states at that time said their exit exams assessed whether students had achieved competencies expected at the high school level (CEP, 2004a).

Although in 2012 more states are expressing a desire to use their exit exams to assess college and career readiness, many states have not yet aligned these assessments to college- and career-readiness standards. Even more work remains to be done in aligning exit exams with postsecondary entry-level standards and/or postsecondary course standards. The gap between what exit exams mean in a high school context and what they mean to postsecondary institutions is evidenced by the limited number of states reporting that their postsecondary institutions use student scores on exit exams for admission, course placement, or scholarship decisions.

Some states may expect their participation in the CCSS and/or common assessment initiatives to help move them closer to truly aligning secondary and postsecondary education. Of the 16 responding states that plan to replace their current exit exams with either the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments or with a new CCSS-aligned state assessment, 11 plan to continue to require students to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma. Three additional states (Indiana, Maryland, and Ohio) plan to replace their current exit exams with the PARCC assessments but have not yet decided whether to continue requiring their students to pass an exit exam.

Nearly all of the states that are revising their exit exams as a result of the CCSS reported that these changes will make their exit exams more rigorous. This could have strong implications for the millions of students who will be entering high school in these states during the next few years. These students—some of whom are already struggling to meet the current, less rigorous exit exam requirements—will soon be expected to meet college- and career-readiness standards that are presumably more rigorous. There is a good chance that many students will fail to do so. Although high schools should be expected to prepare all students for college and/or a career before they graduate, policymakers must ask themselves if these expectations, and the assessments used to measure progress toward them, should come with stakes so high they prevent some students from graduating from high school at all.



Chapter 3: Lessons Learned from States' Past Experiences with Exit Exams

As discussed in chapter 2, many states are considering significant changes to their exit exam policies as they implement the Common Core State Standards and common assessments aligned to these standards. For this and other reasons, we felt it was important to review our 11 years of research on exit exams and draw out lessons that can be learned from state experiences with implementing these exams. These lessons may be particularly useful to states that are replacing their current state assessments with PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments or another CCSS-aligned state assessment, especially if they plan to use these new assessments as an exit exam. This chapter addresses the following issues:

- ▶ Challenges states have faced in implementing new state assessment policies
- ▶ Different approaches states have used to deal with challenges to exit exams
- ▶ The impact of changing state exit exam policies on various student groups
- ▶ The impact of federal No Child Left Behind requirements on exit exams
- ▶ Lessons learned from states' experiences with the preceding four issues and their application to current debates about state assessment policies

The issues discussed in this chapter are supported with examples from specific states, but these examples are meant to be illustrative rather than inclusive. Other states not mentioned in this chapter have confronted similar issues in implementing exit exams. And although some states may have defused the challenges discussed below, they have not eliminated them. Opposition to exit exams, legal challenges, concerns about differential passing rates, and other challenges may persist even after an exam has been in place for a while.

What challenges have states faced when implementing new assessment policies?

States have taken various approaches to meeting the inevitable opposition to exit exam policies. These approaches range from “hanging tough” to finding ways to modify requirements or soften opposition.

Because exit exams have such high stakes for students, opposition is bound to arise. Both proponents and opponents of exit exams have strong arguments for their positions, and this has often led to clashes among key stakeholders in states that are considering or implementing exit exams.

Proponents of exit exams, who often include state governors, chief state school officers, and state boards of education, maintain that requiring students to pass an exam will raise academic achievement and ensure that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills needed for college or careers. For instance, the former governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, wanted to ensure that earning a diploma held value and worth by tying it to an exit exam with high standards, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (Bousquet, 2003; White, 2003). Similarly, Richard Mills, New York's previous Commissioner of Education, supported the requirement of passing the Regents exams to graduate throughout his tenure and believed the tests served to raise academic achievement (Dillon, 2003a).

The business community has been a particularly strong ally behind the passage of exit exams in many states. Business leaders contend that many recent graduates lack even the basic skills needed to succeed in entry-level jobs. For example, in Washington State the Washington Roundtable, the Partnership for Learning, the political-action committee of the Realtors Quality of Life, and the Washington State Labor Council advocated for the implementation of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exit exam policy. The Washington Roundtable went even further by specifically supporting the WASL as a graduation requirement, opposing a potential delay in its implementation, and resisting a proposal to reduce the reading and math requirements of the exam (Cornfield & Stevick, 2007; Shaw, 2007a and 2007b). Higher education leaders and faculty members have also supported exit exams in some states, citing the costs and time involved in providing remediation to the large number of students who enter college unprepared for college-level work. The Pennsylvania Department of Education funded a study that found that one-third of Pennsylvania high school graduates who were enrolled in higher education in-state institutions needed remedial work (Barnes, 2009). These data were used to advocate for the adoption of an exit exam requirement in Pennsylvania—an initiative that was ultimately unsuccessful, as discussed later in this chapter.

Opponents of exit exams often include teachers' unions and advocacy groups for students with special needs. Groups opposed to these exams question the validity and content of the exams and the fairness of denying students a diploma based on a single test. The Florida Education Association raised questions in 2003 about the validity of the state test results, citing discrepancies between high scores on the FCAT and poor performance among Florida's students on the SATs (Postal, 2003). This union also voiced concerns about the state education agency's implementation process of the FCAT and its potentially negative effects on students. David Clark, a spokesman for the union, said that "the only thing [state education officials] have been consistent about is their inconsistency" (Galley, 2001). The Florida Education Association asked the state to delay implementation of the FCAT, but ultimately diplomas were withheld in 2003 as planned.

Opponents of exit exams have also focused on what they see as the inadequate opportunities available for some students to learn the material being tested, the costs of implementation, and the differential impact on minority and low-income students or students with disabilities and English language learners. For example, in California in 2002 and 2003, Public Advocates Inc., the ACLU, and Californians for Justice all opposed implementation of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) based on inequalities in achievement among various groups of students. Californians for Justice and the ACLU argued that the test failed at its goals and was a violation of civil rights laws, and that certain groups of students were being unequally punished for the failures of the state (Californians for Justice, 2003; Pardington, 2003). Meanwhile, Public Advocates Inc. sponsored anti-CAHSEE rallies throughout the state and sued California on behalf of low-income students (Asimov, 2002). This opposition resulted in delays in implementation for some students. (Further details of litigation stemming from this opposition and the resulting delays are discussed in the following section.)

Key stakeholders in favor of or opposed to exit exam policies can help shape public opinion and media coverage to build a critical mass of voters that agree with their positions. For example, a combination of committed state leaders and consistent support from the state's business community enabled Maryland to successfully maintain support for its exit exam policies despite turnover in key individuals. The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education conducted campaigns for several years aimed at raising student achieve-

ment. One statewide effort encouraged employers to ask students for their high school transcripts as part of the hiring process. Several years before diplomas were withheld based on exit exams, students' scores on the high school tests were reported on all student transcripts, so potential employers could see them. The program also included a public relations campaign to convince students of the importance of high achievement and an employer-based campaign to inform employees who are parents about education reform efforts (CEP, 2002).

A different dynamic occurred in Florida in 2003, when Hispanic activist groups collectively threatened to boycott local businesses if graduation requirements were not lifted from the FCAT. These groups felt the exam had a disproportionately negative effect on Hispanic students, who had higher failure rates (Rabin, 2003). The threat of such boycotts appeared to have an impact when former governor Jeb Bush approved alternate graduation requirements, such as substituting college entrance exam scores or acceptance into the military in place of the FCAT.

Despite opposition, all of the states cited above have implemented exit exams, but the debates have played out differently in different states. Some governors have refused to back down in the face of opposition and have succeeded in enacting or maintaining exit exam policies. This was the case during implementation of Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) exams in 2004, when then-Governor Mark Warner was pressured by the NAACP, ACLU, and other civil rights advocacy groups to lower the passing requirements and postpone the graduation requirement (Helderman, 2004). These groups contended that the tests unevenly hurt minority students because these students are more often enrolled in unaccredited schools that are usually underfunded and employ the worst teachers. These groups argued that a mandate requiring all students in the state to take and pass the same test did a disservice to poor and minority students by denying them a diploma at the fault of the state education system. Despite the opposition from these prominent groups, Governor Warner publicly stated that he was opposed to compromise and did not back down from implementing the SOL requirements ("No Retreat," 2003).

In other states, political or educational leaders have responded by finding ways to address or soften some of the opposition to the exams. Many of the policies cited later in this chapter, such as the adoption of alternate routes to a diploma or alternate types of diplomas, were created to make the exit exam requirement more palatable and lessen opposition. These examples of how state leaders have addressed controversy hold lessons for other states that are considering adopting new exit exams or changing their current policies.

Changes in state leadership or state political dynamics can present challenges to state implementation of exit exams.

Changes in the governorship, state superintendency, or state legislature, as well as political disagreements among these key players, can present challenges to implementation of exit exams, even when exams have been in place for a few years. Political inconsistency can also leave schools and students uncertain about what policy changes to expect and feeling lost in their attempts to prepare for them.

An example of this dynamic occurred in Washington State. In the 2002 state elections, Republicans gained control of the state Senate by one seat. In 2003, then-Governor Gary Locke, a Democrat, wanted to scale back the state's exit exam, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), to include only the core subjects of reading, writing, math, and science and to offer students more chances to pass the exam. But legislative action on this proposal became stalled amid a partisan dispute about a charter schools bill. It was not until 2004, when the exit exam changes were separated from the more controversial charter schools legislation, that state lawmakers approved a bill that would allow up to four retakes on the WASL (Shaw, 2004). This allowed Washington to stay on track to fully implement its exit exam policy by 2008, although the science and math assessments were eventually delayed to 2013 due to low pass rates (Shaw, 2007b).

Political dynamics affected Washington State's exit exam again in 2008 when Randy Dorn, the former executive director of the state teachers' union, defeated four-term incumbent Terry Bergeson to become State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Dorn wanted to replace the WASL with end-of-course assessments that were not supported by former Superintendent Bergeson. Before the WASL science and math requirements could be fully implemented, Dorn, with the support of state educators and the business community, replaced the WASL with the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE). The HSPE in reading and writing serves as the state's exit exam; starting with the class of 2015, Washington State will also require students to pass an end-of-course exam in math to graduate.

Efforts to enact an exit exam requirement in Pennsylvania have been fraught with political turmoil. In 2008, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education proposed that the state invest in the development of end-of-course exit exams, a plan supported by then-Governor Ed Rendell. The proposal was strongly opposed by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and both branches of the state legislature, who argued that the exams would undermine local school boards' policymaking authority and cost too much for a state already facing budget shortfalls (Murphy, 2008; "States should already," 2008; Associated Press, 2008). To prevent the Governor and the state board from moving forward with their exit exam plans, the state Senate and House of Representatives passed legislation that required legislative approval before new high school graduation requirements could be enacted—effectively putting a moratorium on further development of a state high school exit exam policy (Panian, 2008).

This action did not put to rest Pennsylvania's political battles over an exit exam, however. In 2009, the state education secretary awarded a contract to a testing company to develop the exams but then decided not to spend the contract funds while the legislature sought a consensus ("Permanent pause," 2009). In 2009, the governor and then-Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak proposed a new scaled-back plan for end-of-course exams with lower stakes than the exit exams proposed in 2008. These end-of-course exams, which came to be known as the Keystone Exams, would count for no more than one-third of a student's course grade, and students would not be required to pass them to graduate. The Keystone Exams were approved in 2009 by the State Board of Education and two state regulatory review commissions (Hardy, 2009; Mauriello & Chute, 2009).

Political disagreements over the Keystone Exams are far from over in Pennsylvania. In March 2011, the new state education secretary, Ron Tomalis, told state senators that the tests' development and use would need to be delayed due to the state's budget deficit. In 2012, Governor Tom Corbett has revived the idea of an exit exam by proposing to make passage of the Keystone Exams a graduation requirement instead of having it count toward a student's final grade in the course. Corbett also proposed reducing the number of tests from ten to three and postponing the requirements so they begin with the class of 2017 (Gibble, 2012).

High school exit exam policies have been the subject of legal battles in some states.

Passing or failing an exit exam can determine whether a student receives a high school diploma—a minimum credential in today's economy. Because of the high stakes attached to these exams, state mandates for exit exams have sometimes been challenged in court.

In California, for example, the nonprofit group Disabilities Rights Advocates filed a class action lawsuit in 2002 that came to be known as *Kidd* (formerly Chapman) *v. California Department of Education*. The plaintiffs contended that the use of the CAHSEE as a diploma requirement discriminated against special education students because students were being tested on material they had never been taught and because the state provided no alternative assessment, no procedure for requesting accommodations, and no process of appeals (Disability Rights Advocates, 2012; Rosenhall, 2005). The class of 2006 was the first for which

diplomas were withheld from students who had not passed the CAHSEE, but a series of bills enacted in response to this lawsuit provided a temporary exemption from the exit exam requirement for special education students who met certain criteria. In 2008, a settlement was reached that called on the state to fund an independent study of the impact of the exit exam requirement on students with disabilities, and subsequent legislation established alternate routes to graduation for these students (Disabilities Rights Advocates, 2012). Emergency regulations have extended the exemption for special education students through September 25, 2012, according to data collected for this report from California state department personnel. Pending permanent regulations would extend the exemption through December 31, 2012, and proposed legislation would further extend it through June 30, 2015.

Arizona's exit exam policy was legally challenged in 2006 when *Espinoza v. State of Arizona* was filed on behalf of a group of students from the class of 2006 who had met all graduation requirements except for passing the exit exam. The plaintiffs argued that the state inadequately funded education, thereby depriving many students—especially racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, and English language learners—of the services they need to pass the exit exam (Kossan & Ryman, 2006; Fischer, 2006). In this case, however, a superior court judge denied the request to suspend the exam for students in this graduating class (Ryman, 2006).

Other examples of legal challenges to exit exams occurred in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Nevada in 2002. The cases in Minnesota and Nevada involved scoring errors that caused thousands of students to be wrongfully informed that they had failed their state's exit exam and were ineligible to graduate. In both cases, the states' testing companies (NCS Pearson in Minnesota and Harcourt Educational Measurement Cooperation in Nevada) were assessed fines for their errors (Pugmire, 2002; Associated Press, 2002).

Low student passing rates on exit exams have spurred several states to delay implementation of new exit exam policies.

Some states have faced challenges to implementing their exit exam policies when initial pass rates on the exams were too low for public comfort. These states have at times responded by postponing the graduation requirement or specific subject tests.

For example, after only 37% of New York State's juniors and seniors passed the Math A Regents exam in 2003, the state's education commissioner at the time, Richard P. Mills, delayed the requirement that students pass the exam to graduate (Dillon, 2003a). Parents, principals, teachers, and lawmakers complained that the test was too difficult and technically flawed, leading Mills to appoint an independent panel of mathematicians and other experts to review the exam. Similar complaints were voiced by science teachers in New York in 2003 about the difficulty of the state's physics exam. Some principals and superintendents decided not to administer the exam, and the New York State Association of School Superintendents issued a letter to college admissions officers urging them to disregard the results of the physics test in considering student applications (Dillon, 2003b). Later that year, Mills proposed delaying plans to raise passing standards on all of the state's exit exams so that the state could make "mid-course adjustments" and work on closing gaps in achievement between high- and low-performing students. The New York Board of Regents approved this proposal (Rubin, 2003). Passing standards were not raised again until the Board of Regents approved a plan in October 2005 to phase in higher passing standards for the graduating class of 2008 (CEP, 2006).

In January 2006, months before Utah was slated to begin withholding diplomas for students who did not pass the reading, math, and science portions of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test, the State Board of Education decided to back away from its exit exam requirement due to low pass rates. At the time, 16% of

seniors in the class of 2006 had not yet passed all three sections of the exam. The state was particularly concerned with very high failure rates in math for some subgroups of students (CEP, 2006).

Oregon faced similar pressure in 2008 when nearly half of the state's sophomores failed the state's exit exam on their first attempt. As a result, Oregon delayed the implementation of the graduation requirement on the math exam to 2014 (Ereline, 2008).

New high school exit exam policies often come with high costs, which pose additional challenges to implementation.

The costs of implementing a state high school exit exam can be high and unpredictable and may pose obstacles to fully implementing exit exam policies. The direct costs of developing and administering tests make up only a small fraction of the total costs of implementing exit exams, as explained in CEP's 2004 report, *Pay Now or Pay Later: The Hidden Costs of High School Exit Exams*. The greater share of the costs is attributable to remediation, prevention, and professional development activities to help students pass the exams—costs that are not always clear at the outset. The extra costs of helping students with disabilities and English language learners pass exit exams can be especially high and are often underestimated or ignored. Moreover, the costs of implementing exit exams may rise when states take steps to increase pass rates or transition to a more challenging exam.

In times of shrinking state budgets, some states have been unable to support the full costs of implementing exit exams and have had to revise or delay certain policies. Louisiana, for example, cut funds from the state budget for school year 2009-10 that had been previously allocated for remediation for students who did not pass its Graduation Exit Exam, according to CEP's 2010 report, *State High School Exit Exams: Exit Exams and Other Assessments*. In Massachusetts, the state commissioner of education responded to budget reductions for 2009 by recommending the postponement of the history and social sciences components of the state exit exam, and in February of that year, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education agreed to waive this requirement for the classes of 2012 and 2013. In 2011, New York State saved money by eliminating its Regents exam in foreign language and delaying plans to develop a new English test. Chapter 2 of this report includes further discussion of changes states made in their exit exam policies for financial reasons during school year 2011-12.

How have states responded to the challenges of implementing a high school exit exam policy?

Some states have responded to low passing rates by offering alternate routes to graduation or alternate diplomas for some or all students.

When a new high school exit exam policy threatens to withhold diplomas from large numbers of students, states often face mounting public opposition to the exam policy. When Florida, Mississippi, and Nevada, for example, replaced their minimum competency exams with standards-based, end-of-course exams and began withholding diplomas based on these new, reputedly tougher tests, large numbers of students found themselves on the verge of being denied diplomas. This state of affairs attracted considerable media attention and intensified public opposition to the exams, as noted in CEP's 2003 report, *State High School Exit Exams: Put to the Test*. In situations like these, state policymakers have acted to minimize ill effects on stu-

dents and calm public opposition without backing down too much from their new exit exam requirements. But this has often proved a difficult balance to achieve.

Florida's requirement for students to pass an exit exam to graduate was scheduled to take effect with the graduating class of 2003. When state education leaders announced in 2003 that approximately 12,500 high school seniors in the state—including many African American and Hispanic students—would be denied diplomas because they had not passed the FCAT, dozens of community activists and politicians protested the test (Rabin, 2003). The protesters claimed that the state's education system did not adequately prepare students to pass the FCAT and that the new policy had a disproportionately negative effect on minority students. Then-Governor Jeb Bush had worked with state legislators earlier that year to ease the new exit exam policies by exempting some students with disabilities from the exam and providing accommodations for other students. But when pressure increased after the low pass rates were disclosed, Governor Bush and the legislature approved more options for students who failed the FCAT. The state decided to award “certificates of completion” to students who failed the FCAT and to institute fast-track GED programs over the summer for these students. Governor Bush also approved legislation to allow scores on other exams—including the SAT, PSAT, ACT, PLAN, College Placement Test, and military entrance exams—to be substituted for FCAT results as a graduation requirement (CEP, 2003).

More recently, the Oklahoma State Board of Education responded to complaints from students, parents, and school officials about its new exit exam policy by allowing students who failed the exams for any reason to file an appeal. The class of 2012 was the first group of Oklahoma seniors required to pass end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English II, and at least two of the following subjects: Algebra II, Biology, English III, Geometry, and U.S. History. As of April 2012, 2,000 students across the state had not yet satisfied the end-of-course exam requirements (Coppernoll, 2012). Although the state already allowed students to substitute scores on the ACT or SAT as an alternate method to meet this requirement, educators argued that test results on those exams do not necessarily predict success beyond high school. As a result, the Oklahoma State Department of Education established an appeals process in April 2012 for students who are denied a diploma but have extenuating circumstances (Allen, 2012). This process was further expanded in May to allow any student to file an appeal (Coppernoll, 2012).

Some states have responded to implementation challenges by offering alternate diplomas or certificates to students who do not pass state exit exams. Often, however, these alternate diplomas or certificates do not have as much credibility as a “regular” diploma among parents, employers, or institutions of higher education. In 2009, eight states with exit exam policies offered a certificate of attendance or certificate of completion to all students who did not meet the exit exam requirements, and an additional four states offered this option specifically to students with disabilities (CEP, 2009). However, data collected for CEP's 2012 report indicate that only three states offered this option to students in 2012.

States have also responded to implementation challenges by funding remediation programs for students who struggle to pass exit exams.

State-funded remediation and related student supports not only can lead to higher student achievement, but can also help reduce opposition to exit exams. In California, Washington, and Arizona, for example, low passing rates stirred up public opposition to exit exam policies in their early years of implementation. This in turn weakened legislative support for the exam requirement, particularly in Arizona. Each of these states responded by providing funds for remediation programs, and many other states have done the same. By 2006, 14 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams at that time funded programs for student support to pass exit exam, as noted in CEP's 2006 report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Challenging Year*. However, it has been difficult to compare how much states spend on student support programs specifically for exit exams. In some states, such as Florida, Texas, and South Carolina, spending for student support for

passing exit exams is subsumed under spending for broader remedial purposes, such as programs to help students at all grade levels pass various types of assessments and anti-dropout programs.

California is one example of a state that has allocated funds specifically to help students pass the state exit exam. In school year 2005-06, the California legislature allocated \$20 million for tutoring programs to help struggling students pass the CAHSEE. When political leaders realized that this funding would support extra courses and materials only for schools in which more than 28% of test-takers failed the CAHSEE, they decided to increase funding for remediation, nearly tripling the allocation to \$57.5 million for 2006-07 (CEP, 2006).

Some states have responded to implementation challenges by requiring school districts to offer remediation services for students who struggled to pass all or some of the state exit exam. By 2006, 18 of the 25 states with exit exams had implemented this type of requirement (CEP, 2006). For example, in 2003, a year before the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) was set to become a graduation requirement, more than three out of four high school students statewide had not passed the math portion of the exam, and one out of three had not passed the reading portion (Stephens, 2003). Susan Tave Zelman, the state superintendent at the time, said she believed the passing requirement was fair but expressed concern over the unacceptable gaps in scores between white and racial/ethnic minority students (Associated Press, 2004). To prepare for the new graduation requirement, the state passed legislation in 2004 that required the lowest-performing districts to give practice tests aligned to the graduation tests to 9th grade students in the fall and to provide interventions for students who showed unsatisfactory progress. Further, all districts were required to provide students who failed an OGT with information about how to prepare for future administrations of the test and with required and optional opportunities for remediation.

How have states responded to gaps in achievement on exit exams among historically low-performing student populations?

Some states have instituted alternate routes or intervention programs in response to concerns about low passing rates on exit exams for minority and low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

States have consistently struggled to raise passing rates on state exit exams for groups of students that perform lower on average, including African American and Hispanic students, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Still, gaps in passing rates on exit exams remain large in most states. Among the states that submitted disaggregated data on initial passing rates for this year's CEP survey, the gap in 2010-11 between white and African American students, for example, ranged from 13 percentage points in Georgia to 36 percentage points in New Jersey in mathematics, and from 8 percentage points in Georgia to 19 percentage points in Washington in English language arts (Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012; New Jersey State Department of Education, 2012; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2012). Gaps between Hispanic and white students were only somewhat smaller, ranging from 2 percentage points in Mississippi to 23 points in Arizona in mathematics, and from 9 percentages points in Mississippi to 19 points in Arizona in English language arts (Arizona Department of Education, 2012; Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). (These examples are intended merely to illustrate that sizable gaps exist; the passing rates of individual states are not comparable because state tests vary so much in difficulty, cut scores, and other characteristics.)

Passing rates for students with disabilities and English language learners also tend to be well below average. In Oregon, which did not begin requiring its students to pass a state exit exam to graduate until 2012, large gaps in achievement on the state tests were already evident by 2010. Just 15% of the English language learners in the state and less than half of the state's African American and Hispanic test-takers passed the exam that year (Hammond, 2010).

States have responded to these achievement gaps in a number of different ways. In Ohio, for example, achievement gaps on exit exams became a hotly contested issue in 2003. Sophomores took the OGT in 2003 and 2004 as a “dry run” before the test became a graduation requirement for sophomores in 2005. After the first administration of the OGT math test in 2003, 77% of the state's students failed the test, and nearly 95% of the state's African American students failed the exam. Some technical experts and state reviewers criticized the math test, charging that it was too difficult, was based on overly ambitious expectations, or was based on too many academic content standards and benchmarks (Fisher & Elliott, 2004). The Ohio Department of Education responded by scaling back the OGT in 2004 and providing more leniency in the scoring of the exam. Bob Bowers, deputy superintendent at the time, explained that state officials learned from the “dry runs” of the math exam that test changes in rigor and complexity should be phased in over time. To address the gaps in achievement among racial/ethnic groups and between poor students and their peers, the Department of Education launched a program called “Schools of Promise” that would identify high-achieving schools (such as those with high test scores despite high poverty levels) to share their strategies and most promising practices with struggling schools (Fisher & Elliott, 2004).

In 2007, CEP asked states specifically about their funding efforts and technical assistance targeted toward closing achievement gaps on state exit exams and learned that 15 states were providing targeted funding or technical assistance for this purpose (CEP, 2007). For example, Massachusetts reported making grants available for services for students with disabilities and English language learners; for transportation in rural districts and in districts with high populations of low-income students; and for school support specialists to coordinate and implement district support to the 10 urban districts with the highest numbers of schools identified for improvement, restructuring, or corrective action under the No Child Left Behind Act. Georgia reported providing academic coaches and training initiatives in both reading and math, and Florida reported providing funding to districts for instructional services to ELLs and various types of technical assistance for teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many of the special efforts to address gaps in passing rates between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers have included offering alternate paths to graduation and/or alternate diplomas or certificates specifically to these students. In response to low passing rates for students with disabilities, California policymakers enacted legislation that created an alternative assessment and an appeals process for these students. Later legislation created alternate routes to graduation for students with disabilities in California (Disabilities Rights Advocates, 2012).

Despite large achievement gaps on exit exams for English language learners, many states have continued to require these students to pass exit exams (albeit with accommodations), rather than develop waivers or exemptions specifically for this group. As discussed in chapter 2, several states offer alternate routes to graduation to ELLs and other student populations who struggle to pass exit exams.

Even with the introduction of student support services and alternate routes, the impacts of exit exams on historically lower-performing groups are not fully known and have yet to be fully addressed.

Even with the availability of alternate paths, disparities in passing rates for different student groups continue to be a concern in states with exit exams. Several past CEP reports have noted that more commitment at

the state level is needed to effectively monitor the impacts of exit exam policies on all students, and particularly on historically lower-achieving students. CEP's 2002 baseline report on exit exams emphasized the need for states to devote more funds toward collecting evidence of the impacts of these exams on minority students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and ELLs, as well as on high-performing students; the impact of exit exams on student learning and dropout rates; and the relationship between exit exams and postsecondary or workplace outcomes.

California is one of the few states that have established such a priority. The state legislation that authorized the new high school exit exam also called for an independent evaluation of the program. This evaluation is conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) and reports on the quality of the test items, as well as trends in student performance, retention, graduation rates, dropout rates, and college attendance. The annual studies make recommendations for improving the technical quality of the tests and inform policymakers about the consequences of the testing program. The first two evaluation reports influenced the development of the new test. Five additional annual evaluations commissioned by the California Department of Education were conducted before the state began withholding diplomas in 2006, and HumRRO has conducted annual evaluations each year since. These evaluations have found that trends in passing rates over time have indicated steady improvement in student competency in the content standards measured by the CAHSEE, but researchers have recommended further study to investigate the persistent though slightly narrowing gaps in test results among some subgroups. The annual evaluations also provide a vehicle for the state to commission special studies when a need arises, such as assessing instructional changes over time or studying postsecondary outcomes of California's high school graduates.

Several academic studies have examined the differential effects of exit exams on various student groups. A study by Ou (2009), for example, found that minority and low-income students who barely failed New Jersey's exit exam were more likely to drop out of high school than comparable students from other groups, particularly if the students failed on their first attempt. Ou speculated this may be because students who try hard but still fail become discouraged, or because the perceived cost of preparing for retests is high if remedial resources are limited or if schools fail to provide sufficient information on retake opportunities and alternate ways to graduate.

A study of Massachusetts' exit exam by Papay, Murnane, and Willett (2010) found that low-income students from urban environments appear to be more susceptible, on average, to the effects of failing the exam than their wealthier, suburban peers. Low-income urban students are more likely to drop out of high school after barely failing the test on their first attempt than those students who barely passed, a finding that did not apply to students who were not from urban schools or from low-income families. The researchers propose several possible reasons for this finding: that these students may become discouraged, that remedial resources in urban schools are stretched thinly, that placement in remedial courses may cause students to lose motivation, or that families may lack the resources to help these students overcome the hurdle imposed by failing the exam.

Though these studies shed some light on possible negative effects of exit exams on some student groups, more state-level data are needed to continue to monitor these impacts. Until states develop mechanisms for closely monitoring the outcomes of students who both pass and fail exit exams, it will be difficult to fully understand how students are impacted.

How have the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act influenced state exit exam policies?

Because most states with high school exit exams also use these exams for NCLB accountability, responses to NCLB requirements can affect state exit exam policies.

Although the No Child Left Behind Act does not require students to pass an exit exam to graduate from high school, it does require states to test students annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school. Moreover, the results of the tests administered for NCLB are used to determine whether schools have made “adequate yearly progress” toward state-set student achievement targets and which schools should be subject to interventions aimed at improving their performance.

In 2004, 19 of the 25 states with state high school exit exams were also using these exams to meet federal NCLB accountability requirements, according to CEP’s 2004 report, *High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform*. By using the same exam for graduation decisions and federal accountability, states could not only save resources and cut down on testing, but also create more cohesive and integrated state testing systems. For example, using exams for both purposes minimizes the amount of time students and teachers spend preparing for and taking tests and eliminates the expenses involved in developing, updating, and administering a second exam. Administering one test may also make it easier for states to develop tests in other languages for English language learners or alternate tests for students with disabilities.

In addition, NCLB may have given states greater incentive to provide remediation and other student supports (CEP, 2006). High schools that receive federal Title I funds and have low rates of student proficiency on state exams are likely to be identified for sanctions under the NCLB school improvement process. To improve test performance and help schools avoid these sanctions, some states have increased remediation and support services.

But using state exit exams to comply with NCLB accountability requirements may also bring negative incentives. For example, one well-documented concern of NCLB is that it puts pressure on states to focus on reading and math at the expense of other subjects such as science and social studies, which could impact a state’s decision about which subjects to test as a graduation requirement. (Chapter 1 of this report explains that reading and math are the most commonly tested subjects on state exit exams.) Using the same exam for graduation and accountability purposes may also intensify the pressure on students and teachers to do well because the exam has high stakes for both groups.

Some states that use exit exams for NCLB accountability have set different cut scores for each purpose. In some cases, the cut scores required for graduation are lower than those used to determine proficiency for NCLB purposes.

NCLB required states to establish annual targets for the percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests in reading and mathematics. These targets must increase periodically and culminate in 100% of students scoring proficient on state tests by 2014 (although this latter requirement has recently been waived in states approved for NCLB waivers). States that opted to use their exit exams for NCLB purposes had to decide whether to use the same cut score for passing exit exams as they used to determine proficiency for NCLB. In 2004, 10 of the 19 states that used exit exams for both purposes had set the same cut scores on these exams for both student graduation requirements and NCLB proficiency, while 6 states (California,

Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, and Massachusetts) set different cut scores for each purpose (CEP, 2004). Two additional states (Mississippi and Washington) had not yet decided.

States that used different cut scores for each purpose typically set lower cut scores for graduation purposes than for NCLB accountability to ensure a higher passing rate and dampen public opposition to exit exams. This was the case in California, Florida, Louisiana, and Massachusetts. Georgia kept the cut score the same but added more difficult test items to evaluate adequate yearly progress for NCLB. Idaho used a lower cut score for graduation purposes for the classes of 2006 and 2007, but began using the higher NCLB cut score for graduation purposes with the class of 2008.

Since 2004, policies in states that use the same exams for both purposes have changed somewhat. According to the data collected from our state surveys in 2012, four additional states are now using exit exams to determine NCLB accountability as well as to grant diplomas. Two of these states (Arkansas and Oklahoma) have implemented new exit exam policies, and the other two (Minnesota and New Mexico) have replaced their previous exit exams with new exams that are used for both purposes. Only three states currently use different cut scores for each purpose, fewer than in 2004. As previously mentioned, Idaho began using the same cut scores with the class of 2008, and Florida and Georgia have also made that change.

What lessons can be learned?

As discussed in chapter 2, many states with current or planned exit exam policies are at a point where they must decide how their exit exams will evolve to assess students for college and career readiness and how these policies will be impacted by the implementation of the CCSS and the common assessments. When making these decisions, state policymakers, state education department personnel, and other education stakeholders can and should take into account the lessons learned from states' past experiences with implementing new exit exam policies and changing their existing policies. Over the past 11 years of studying the implementation of high school exit exams, CEP has learned the following:

Successful implementation of exit exams depends on maintaining the support of key state leaders, stakeholder groups, and the public.

Any policy that denies high school diplomas to students will face inevitable opposition from groups representing the interests of those students who will be most affected. States that have successfully implemented exit exams have persevered through this opposition by maintaining the support of key groups and state leaders with the political capital needed to push these policies through. An example of this approach occurred in Maryland; as described above, this state utilized the business community to launch a public relations campaign and garner support for its education reforms, including a new exit exam policy. Maintaining this kind of support has been achieved in other states in a variety of ways, such as those listed below:

- Revising policies in ways that address the concerns of the opposition without compromising the policy's original intent
- Working with stakeholders to build support
- Utilizing political capital
- Considering alternate paths and diplomas to garner support from student advocacy groups

Some implementation challenges can be avoided by phasing in new exit exam policies or changes to current policies over several years.

This chapter discussed examples of how states have responded to implementation challenges. Some states have been able to avoid a great deal of fallout from those challenges by implementing new exit exams over several years while monitoring their impact before diplomas are actually withheld. This implementation over time allows policymakers and state education leaders to make adjustments and corrections prior to preventing students from graduating from high school. It also gives students, teachers, and parents enough time to understand what is expected under the new requirements and gives schools enough time to align their curriculum and instruction to the new expectations. Finally, since exit exam policies also influence students at grade levels leading into high school, phasing in new policies or changes to current policies over time is needed to ensure that teachers and schools can provide students in these lower grades with the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills they will be held accountable for in high school.

Implementing a new exit exam policy or changing a current policy requires flexibility in order to adapt exit exam policies to meet changing times and needs.

Several of the state examples described in this chapter show how states must exercise flexibility in adapting their planned exit exams to meet the changing demands of education stakeholders. For example, some states have experienced demands for increased rigor in the material tested on their exams. This has led to states moving from minimum competency exams to standards-based exams in the past, and more recently to end-of-course exams and/or college- and career-readiness assessments. Some states have also increased the rigor of their exams by raising the grade level to which the tested content is aligned.

Some states have displayed flexibility in their exit exam policies by eliminating their exit exam requirements when they are no longer consistent with state priorities for education reform. As discussed in chapter 1 of this report, several states have moved away from requiring that students pass an exit exam to graduate and instead are counting scores on end-of-course exams as a percentage of a student's final grade in that course. States should be mindful of this same sort of flexibility when the political climate of the state changes, especially during a change of leadership, the election of a new state education chief, or when a new political party assumes control of the state legislature or board of education.

States must be fully financially committed to exit exams in order for these policies to succeed.

As explained in this chapter, exit exam policies are often accompanied by a number of unexpected costs, which can pose challenges to implementation. For these policies to succeed, however, they must be accompanied by a variety of meaningful supports—all of which cost money. High school exit exam policies cannot be treated as low-cost or no-cost solutions to education problems. Furthermore, states cannot expect school districts to bear the financial burden of these policies.

Providing sufficient support for students to pass exit exams is essential to a successful exit exam policy.

As described above, a number of states have responded to low student performance on exit exams and waning support for their new policies by funding remediation programs and/or requiring school districts to provide these kinds of student supports. These remediation programs are vital to the success of an exit exam policy, which is intended to increase student learning, not to push students out of school without a diploma. Other support systems that can improve student performance on exit exams include increased professional development to help teachers prepare students for these exams and prevention services for at-risk students beginning as early as the elementary grades.

Policies that are not directly related to exit exams can still have an impact on these exams.

No Child Left Behind has had an impact on states' exit exam policies, even though it does not require states to institute an exit exam. Moving forward, states should consider how the implementation of other policies in their state could impact their exit exams. Examples of these policies include the following:

- ▶ The implementation of the CCSS and/or common assessments
- ▶ Assessment policies outlined in applications for waivers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
- ▶ Assessment assurances outlined in applications for Race to the Top grants in states that received those funds
- ▶ Future reauthorization of ESEA

Finally, states must admit that several key questions about exit exams remain unresolved.

State leaders have an ongoing responsibility to ensure the success of the reforms they have enacted. With that in mind, it is important to recognize that several questions remain unanswered regarding how well exit exam policies have achieved their intended purposes. First, if exit exams were intended to raise student achievement, have they actually done so? Very little (if any) evidence exists to suggest they have. For example, Grodsky et. al (2009) found no relationship between the adoption of an exit exam (or a change from a less rigorous to more rigorous test) and increased student achievement when they analyzed student achievement in states with exit exams using individual-level long term trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 1971 to 2004. They also did not find any effects of exit exams on student achievement when they looked specifically at low-performing vs. high-performing students. Similar conclusions were reached by Reardon et. al (2009), who analyzed differences in student achievement before and after the adoption of the CAHSEE in four large urban districts in California. After reviewing data on three cohorts of 10th graders, two of which were subject to the exit test requirement and one of which was not, they found that the exit exam was not associated with any increase or decrease in student achievement between the different cohorts. Nor did they find an association for the lowest-achieving students. Holme et. al (2010) conclude from these two studies that, taken together, they concur that the adoption of high school exit exams is not associated with any achievement gains or losses, and that “the evidence indicates that low-achieving students—those often targeted by these policies—do not experience gains under the more rigorous exams” (p. 487-488).

Further, as discussed in chapter 2, exit exams are seldom used for college admissions or other decisions by institutions of higher education and are not used much by employers despite the business community's sup-

port for these policies. It remains to be seen whether or not realigning exit exams to college and career expectations will mean exit exams hold more value for colleges and/or employers. It is also too soon to tell what role the CCSS and common assessments will play in bridging the gap between graduation requirements and meaningful postsecondary expectations for students.

Similarly, as discussed in this chapter, many questions remain to be answered about the extent to which exit exams negatively impact racial/ethnic minority students, poor students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. States have not, by and large, supported major research on important effects of these exams, such as their impact on curriculum and achievement, prevalence of students relying on alternate paths, or the relationship between these exams and students choosing to drop out of school. Without funding for research built into states' plans for these exams, they cannot adequately ensure the success of these policies or understand the impacts on their students.



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Appendix A. Impact of Common Core State Standards in states with high school exit exams*

State	Will state continue to require students to pass exit exam to graduate?	Will state replace current exit exam in ELA with new CCSS-aligned assessments?	Will state replace current exit exam in math with new CCSS-aligned assessments?	Will these changes make state's exit exams more rigorous, less rigorous, or about the same?
Alabama	No [†]	Yes, with a new state assessment*	Yes, with a new state assessment*	More rigorous*
Alaska [§]	NA	NA	NA	NA
Arizona	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Arkansas	Yes	Will begin using PARCC assessments to implement new exit exam requirement	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
California	Yes	No	No	NA
Florida	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Georgia	Other [†]	Other*	Other*	NA
Idaho	Yes	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	More rigorous
Indiana	Not yet known	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Louisiana	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Maryland	Not yet known	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Minnesota [‡]	Yes [‡]	No [‡]	NA	NA
Mississippi	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	About the same (ELA) More rigorous (math)
Nevada	Yes	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	More rigorous
New Jersey	Not yet known	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
New Mexico	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
New York	Yes	Yes, with new state assessments, possibly PARCC pending approval	Yes, with new state assessments, possibly PARCC pending approval	More rigorous
Ohio	Not yet known	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	More rigorous
Oregon	Yes	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	Yes, with SMARTER Balanced assessments	About the same (ELA) More rigorous (math)
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Yes, with PARCC assessments	Not yet known
South Carolina	Not yet known	Not yet known	Not yet known	Not yet known
Virginia [§]	NA	NA	NA	NA
Washington	Not yet known	Not yet known	Not yet known	Not yet known

Table reads: The Alabama official responding to CEP's special survey on the future of state high school exit exams reported that Alabama does not plan to continue to require students to pass an exam to graduate from high school in light of the state's adoption of the CCSS. Alabama will replace its current exit exams in both ELA and math with new state assessments aligned to the CCSS. The Alabama respondent said these changes will make the state's exit exams more rigorous.

*Texas did not respond to CEP's special survey and is not shown in this table.

†Both Alabama and Georgia are phasing out their exit exam requirements and instead will count students' scores on end-of-course exams as a portion of their final course grades. The respondent from Georgia explained that the decision to phase out their exit exam was already underway prior to adoption of the CCSS.

‡Minnesota adopted the CCSS in English language arts only, so this response applies to this subject only.

§Alaska and Virginia have not adopted the CCSS in either English language arts or math, so these questions did not apply to these states.