



States Try Harder, But Gaps Persist

High School Exit Exams 2005

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Credits

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About the Center on Education Policy

Based in Washington, D.C., 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. The Center works to help 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 help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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Chapter 1

Summary of Main Findings about Exit Exams for 2005

This is the fourth annual report on state exit exams produced by the Center on Education Policy, an independent advocate for public education in Washington, D.C. It is a product of the Center's comprehensive multi-year study of exit exams and is based on information we collected from 25 states with current or planned exit exams, on our own research, and on our review of other major research in this field. The report aims to be a comprehensive review of the status, characteristics, and effects of exit exams. It emphasizes developments that have occurred and research findings that have been released or publicized since the Center's August 2004 report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform*.

This year we slightly modified our reporting strategy. Rather than fully revisiting many of the topics that we have reported on in depth in the past, we provide brief updates in those areas. We focus on new or expanded areas of reporting, such as graduation rates, state remediation efforts, and accommodations for students with disabilities. More detailed information about topics not covered this year, such as the issue of whether exit exams increase dropout rates, can be found in our 2004 report. In this year's report, we have also begun a practice of examining one crucial topic in depth. This year our topic of special focus is English language learners. Chapter 6 offers the most comprehensive look to date on issues related to the participation of ELLs in high school exit exams.

This summary chapter gives an overview of the report's major themes and findings. We also briefly review the findings of case studies we conducted in the winter of 2004-05 of the impact of exit exams in two school districts. A detailed report on these case studies was released earlier this year (CEP, 2005b). This chapter also describes the methods we used to identify issues and collect information for this year's study. A final section contains a list of major abbreviations used elsewhere in the report.

FIVE MAJOR FINDINGS

This year the Center on Education Policy reached five new main findings about state exit exams:

- Innovative programs and policies are beginning to spring up in states with exit exams.
- Over the past year, states have developed more supports for students and committed more funds to help students pass exit exams.
- Initial pass rates and achievement gaps have proved to be stubborn to move, especially in states where exit exams have been in place for several years.
- States are improving their ability to track and report on student-level data, which should help in the future to clear up some nagging questions about the impacts of exit exams on dropouts and achievement.

- Resolving fundamental questions about the fairness of exit exams and appropriateness of supports for English language learners is crucial if this reform is to succeed in helping all students.

The sections that follow explain each of these five findings. In addition to these broad findings, the Center has arrived at specific key findings for each chapter. These appear in the Key Findings section at the beginning of the chapter.

Innovation

In the first three years of tracking exit exam policies, the Center noticed that many policies and programs to support exit exams looked very similar across states. For example, Ohio and Massachusetts adopted appeals processes that were slight modifications of Indiana's process, and many states relied on SAT or ACT scores as an alternate means to award diplomas rather than crafting their own solutions to low pass rates. Over the past 18 months, however, states have begun developing more innovative policies and programs to better implement exit exam systems and help students meet these requirements. For example, Arizona has adopted a compensatory scoring policy whereby students' exit exam scores can increase by up to 25% if they earn A, B, or C grades in key academic courses (Chapter 3). Before this year, only Maryland had a compensatory scoring policy, one that looks very different from Arizona's model. Washington State is also currently exploring a number of alternate assessments, all of which are unlike anything other states have done or are considering (Chapter 3).

When Idaho decided to require students to pass an exit exam, instead of setting a distant date for requiring students to pass the test, the state decided to roll out the policy in a different way. Students in the class of 2006 must pass the tests at the eighth grade level, the class of 2007 must pass at the ninth grade level and the classes of 2008 and beyond must pass at the tenth grade or full proficiency level (Chapter 2). This type of rollout may hasten implementation of preventive and remediation policies better than the typical pattern of last-minute fixes that some other states have used.

States are also working on innovative ways to adjust their curricula and coursework to meet the demands of exit examinations (Chapter 4). Maryland is experimenting with rearranging the order of high school courses and attempting to prepare students for the exam from a younger age. This process begins with officials examining students' seventh grade assessment results and then adjusting their high school curriculum accordingly (Kay, 2005). Ohio has adopted a similar strategy of "pushing down" course content and teaching more advanced topics at lower grades. Material that was once taught in tenth grade is now being covered at the ninth grade level to help students prepare for the new Ohio Graduation Tests (High school exit exam gets harder, 2005).

States may be feeling more comfortable with striking out into new policy territory and with trying innovative approaches because high school exit exams have matured as a reform. While we applaud innovation and believe that experimentation can reap many benefits, we also caution states to follow systematic development and evaluation processes while creating and implementing these innovations, so that both intended and unintended effects are fully

understood and the state is confident the innovations help solve the problems for which they were undertaken in the first place.

Better Supports for Students

Based on our original research on the costs associated with exit exams, the Center has argued over the past three years that an integrated, well-funded package of supports is necessary to improve student achievement on high school exit exams and to ensure students have an opportunity to learn the material on the tests. Over the past year, states have made a great deal of progress toward addressing these very issues with new policies and new funds (Chapter 4).

Several states seem to be developing more comprehensive and appropriate policies to help students pass exit exams. For example, seven states expanded alternative routes to a diploma for students struggling to pass exit exams. Florida, North Carolina, and New York approved new or additional opportunities for students to substitute scores on other standardized tests, such as the ACT or SAT tests, for passing scores on the state's exit exam. South Carolina instituted a process for students to appeal their scores on the exit exam.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of preparation and remediation materials and programs offered by states to struggling students, as well as additional funding to support these programs. This year 19 states report having developed resources for struggling students, a significant increase over the 10 states that reported so last year. For example, Idaho and Nevada are among several states that have provided new support for technology-based remediation and test prep, such as online remedial tools in subjects tested by exit exams.

More states also reported additional funding that is specifically tied to exit exam preparation and remediation efforts than in the past. For example, Texas allocated \$2 million in 2004-05 for personalized study guides for students who do not pass a section of the exit-level TAKS. Arizona has also sought to provide students with individualized intervention, and in early 2005 the state allocated \$10 million for its individual tutoring programs, although less than \$1 million had been spent as of mid-summer due to a lack of participation. Nevada has also provided remediation money for which high schools can apply. In 2003-04 the state provided \$874,000 in funds for remediation of students in grades 11-12. Louisiana has a similarly targeted program that provided \$2.7 million in 2004-05 for remediation programs for students in grades 10-11 who had failed the exit exam. Likewise, during 2004-05, Tennessee allocated \$4 million for remediation for students who had failed the state Gateway tests. Indiana committed \$11 million in 2004-05 for remediation services for students in grades 10-12 who failed the exam.

Some state legislatures have increased general funding for schools, based on the logic that districts will apportion funds wisely and appropriately to respond to such needs as preparing students to meet graduation requirements, and that a part of this general increase will help districts become more capable of preparing students toward this end. While more resources will likely be needed as states try to increase their graduation and pass rates, the Center is encouraged by the growing acknowledgement that it takes more than the tests themselves to spur achievement. Still, a great deal more can and should be done.

Pass Rates

Increasing the overall percentages of students who pass exit exams on the first try continues to be a struggle for most states, and achievement gaps among subgroups of students are still very large (Chapter 5). On the whole, initial pass rates reported this year were relatively similar to those reported last year, with small increases in some states and little to no change in many others. Six states, however, had substantial increases from last year. Five of these states (Maryland, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington) have either just begun withholding diplomas this year because of a new exam or are giving tests for which they are not currently withholding diplomas. This pattern suggests that states which have had exit exams in place for a while have stagnating scores. Some states have also seen notable increases in initial pass rates for minority students, students from low-income families, English language learners, or students with disabilities. In several cases, these are the same states that made overall gains in initial pass rates.

Increasing initial pass rates and reducing achievement gaps are important goals in themselves, but they are also worth pursuing because many states use the initial scores on their exit exams as a main determinant of whether schools and school districts are making adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind law. Without intensive new supports and additional funding, states will struggle to graduate their students from high school and avoid the penalties of NCLB.

More Data

In previous years, the Center and its advisory panels have called for better data tracking systems to improve research on and tracking of the impacts of high school exit examinations. An increasing number of states report that they are developing systems of student-level identifiers, which will allow them to track the enrollment or dropout status and achievement of individual students (Chapter 5). As a result, more robust data should be available in future years to explore student performance across time and the interactions between exit exams and enrollment. According to our survey, 12 states have systems of student identifiers in place, and 9 more states are developing these systems.

Some benefits of this data tracking are already emerging. This year, more states were able to provide us with both initial and cumulative pass rate data disaggregated by student subgroups. This year, we received disaggregated initial pass rate data from a total of 24 states, an increase from the 18 states that provided this subgroup data last year. We also received more disaggregated data on cumulative pass rates than we have in the past.

English Language Learners

Fundamental questions have yet to be answered about the fairness of requiring English language learners to pass exit examinations and the most effective supports to help them succeed. In many states, the percentage of ELLs who pass the mathematics exit exam on the first try is still 30 to 40 percentage points lower than overall initial pass rates, according to the Center's survey of states with exit exams. In reading, the gap is often greater. This raises the

possibility that large numbers of ELLs could be denied a high school diploma based on their test performance.

Whether exit exam scores are valid, reliable, and fair indicators of what ELLs know and can do is not yet settled—a situation that complicates state efforts to hold all students to the same test requirements. For example, many ELLs do not receive the same instruction on the material tested as other students because they spend a large portion of their time learning English as a second language. Concerns about fairness can threaten to derail or delay exit exams. As this report went to press, activists asked a federal judge to allow students in Arizona who are struggling with English to graduate from high school without passing the state's exit exam, at least until the state complies with a federal court order to improve funding for ELL instruction (Sherwood, 2005b).

New strategies, which are mostly in the research stage, could increase the validity of exit exam scores for ELLs. These include reducing the complexity of the language used in the tests and accounting for cultural factors in scoring test items. New support policies and funding are necessary to improve achievement for these students and can lead to positive outcomes for ELLs. In addition, the evidence shows that ELLs who receive effective educational supports can achieve as much or more as other students. Outcomes from New York and California indicate that former ELLs—students who become proficient in English and exit ELL status—are more likely to pass exit exams and are more likely to graduate than students as a whole. But without supports to help ELLs achieve proficiency and be exposed to appropriate content and standards, states face a serious challenge to their high school reform efforts.

KEY FINDINGS FROM DISTRICT CASE STUDIES

How are high school exit exams affecting districts, teachers, and students? As a starting point for identifying and understanding the issues related to this question, the Center on Education Policy conducted case studies of the implementation of exit exams in two school districts. Carried out during the winter of 2004-05, one case study looked at a district in Virginia, where the Standards of Learning end-of-course exams are already being used to withhold diplomas. The second case study took place in a district in Maryland, where the end-of-course High School Assessments will become a graduation requirement in 2009. The districts participated on the condition they would not be identified by name. The detailed findings of the study were published in the June 2005 report, *How Have High School Exit Exams Changed Our Schools? Some Perspectives from Virginia and Maryland* (CEP, 2005b).

While the study was not representative of the impact of exit exams nationally or in other states or districts, it did provide an in-depth look of the impacts of exit exams on a local level. It also explored the changes that have taken place with exit exams and the benefits and drawbacks that stakeholders feel they confer. Our main findings are summarized here.

Our case studies found that exit exams are having a significant impact in both states, with predictably greater pressure in Virginia, where high stakes are already in place for students. We observed that teachers and principals in both districts were highly committed to helping students

pass the exam and were taking a variety of steps to ensure their success. One such step was to rearrange staffing and use the strongest teachers for tested subjects, and a related step was to add staff support for remediation. Additionally, educators had increased their focus on teaching topics and skills covered by the test, as well as reviewing information and test-taking skills. This instructional shift was particularly prominent during the time of the school year right before testing. To better prepare students to pass the SOL exams, teachers in Virginia were also revising classroom assessments to more closely mimic the format and content of what students will face on exit exams. Finally, both districts were devoting additional time to remediation in schools, including test prep classes. The districts were also providing additional supports for teachers and students, including professional development, curriculum maps, online resources, and study guides.

These case studies also highlighted some of the benefits and drawbacks of exit exams, as well as challenges that remain for policymakers, administrators, and educators. The changes in instruction were viewed by students and teachers as having both positive and negative elements. On the positive side, educators are better focusing their instruction and aligning it more with curriculum, but on the negative side, some teachers and students feel that there is too much review of facts and less emphasis on discussion, in-depth learning, and higher-level skills. Others worry that content and subjects not on the exam are being shortchanged. There is also some concern that as teachers push to cover all tested material, struggling students may be left behind.

Still, both districts cited important benefits from the implementation of exit exams. These included encouraging educators to talk about student performance and making reluctant teachers follow the state curriculum. Also both districts noted an increase in cooperation among teachers, including more dialogue between regular education and special education teachers to promote student success.

Since both Maryland and Virginia use exit exams, teachers have been concerned about the relationship between end-of-course exit exams and the traditional final exams for the course. While teachers recognized the need for exit exams to be administered early enough to produce results for graduation, they expressed concern about students losing interest after taking the first exam. Other challenges for district and state officials include providing more resources and boosting student awareness of exams. Administrators and teachers in both districts expressed the need for additional resources related to exit exams, including funds to cover the costs of transportation for students taking retests and of instructional time lost due to additional tests and retests. Finally, although most students are now aware of the exit exam requirement, some students still lack accurate and widespread information about the content of exams and the range of resources and testing options available.

STUDY METHODS

The Center on Education Policy used a variety of methods to identify issues and collect information for this year's study. In particular, we took the following steps:

- Conducted a detailed survey of states with current or planned exit exams

- Convened a national panel to closely examine exit exams and their impacts on English language learners (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of this panel's work)
- Reviewed major research conducted by others on exit exams
- Kept abreast of important events related to exit exams

State Survey Methods

As our primary research tool for this year's study, the Center on Education Policy designed and conducted a survey of state department of education officials, usually officials from the state's assessment department. In April and May 2005, we contacted these officials and asked them to fill out surveys and verify information we had collected and reported in our 2004 report. We used these data to develop the state profiles at the end of this report and to calculate the tallies of state exam characteristics, policies, and actions that appear throughout the report. After developing the profiles, we sent them back to states for review to ensure that we had accurately portrayed states' testing systems.

All 25 states with current or planned exit exams responded to our survey. (One state—Oklahoma—enacted a law requiring an exit exam after we had completed our survey. We will begin tracking the work of this 26th state with an exit exam requirement starting next year.) Some states did not answer all of the survey questions, often simply because the data were not available or the policies in the state were in flux. We have tried our best to include accurate and up-to-date information in this report, but undoubtedly some statistics or policies will have changed soon after publication because events in this field move so quickly. For several questions, states were unable to provide supporting documentation of their responses, or the Center may have been unable to verify the information provided by states. In those cases, we have included their responses in the report but noted that we could not verify their responses.

Other Methods

The Center staff and consultants also conducted literature reviews of relevant studies that were published or publicized during the past year. In addition, we tracked media coverage of exit exams and searched state department of education Web sites for exit exam developments.

Criteria for Including States in Our Study

This study focuses on mandatory exit exams. These exams merit attention because they are becoming more widespread and are likely to have a greater impact on students' futures than most other tests. Included in our study are states that meet the following criteria:

- States that require students to pass, not just take, state exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma, even if the students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grade

- States in which the exit exams are a state mandate rather than a local option—in other words, states that require students in all local school districts to pass exit exams, rather than allowing local districts to decide for themselves whether to make the exams a condition of graduation

We also include states that are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams that meet these two criteria. By phasing in, we mean that the state has a legislative or state board charge to have a test in place between 2005 and 2012; has already begun developing the tests; and is trying out the tests with students, although diplomas are not yet being withheld.

This report often refers to an exit exam in the singular, but actually a state exit exam is more like an exam system, consisting of multiple tests in different subjects, such as mathematics, English language arts, science, or social studies.

As an alternative to requiring students to pass an exit exam to receive a diploma, some states use graduation exams to motivate students in different ways, but these states are not included in this study. Last year, Illinois enacted legislation to require all high school students to take the Prairie State Achievement Exam as a condition of graduation, but students do not have to pass the exam to graduate. Nor does this study include states that have differentiated diploma systems instead of mandatory exit exams. Delaware, for example, plans to use state high school exams to award advanced or endorsed diplomas to students who perform well on the tests. Wisconsin has a state high school exam, but has left it up to local school districts to determine whether to require students to pass this test before graduating, or even whether to develop their own local graduation test. Some Wisconsin districts do make the test a condition for graduation, while others focus their graduation requirements on grades and course completion.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The report is organized as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses the number of states with current or planned high school exit exams, the number of students affected by those exams, the main characteristics of these tests, and other uses for these tests.
- Chapter 3 reviews media coverage of and public responses to exit exams and describes the major changes states have made in their exit exam policies over the past year.
- Chapter 4 examines the preparation and remediation assistance and other supports that states are providing to help students pass exit exams. It also looks at the alternate routes to a diploma available to general education students and the test accommodations and other special options available to help students with disabilities meet exit exam requirements.
- Chapter 5 explores initial and cumulative pass rates on exit exams and graduation rates in states with exit exams.

- Chapter 6 outlines the reasons why English language learners warrant particular attention in exit exam discussions and describes the policies and strategies states are using to include ELLs in these exams. The chapter also reviews our findings about remediation policies for ELLs and the impact of exit exams on graduation rates for ELLs.
- The list of references for the entire report appears after Chapter 6.
- State profiles of the exit exam systems in 25 states make up the final section of the report. These profiles provide detailed information about each state’s testing policies, features, and impacts.

The full report and the state profiles can also be read and downloaded from the Center’s Web site at www.cep-dc.org.

KEY ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

The following abbreviations are used multiple times in this report. Other abbreviations that are used just a few times in the report are defined in the text the first time they appear.

State Name Abbreviations

AK	Alaska	NC	North Carolina
AL	Alabama	NJ	New Jersey
AZ	Arizona	NM	New Mexico
CA	California	NV	Nevada
FL	Florida	NY	New York
GA	Georgia	OH	Ohio
ID	Idaho	SC	South Carolina
IN	Indiana	TN	Tennessee
LA	Louisiana	TX	Texas
MA	Massachusetts	UT	Utah
MD	Maryland	VA	Virginia
MN	Minnesota	WA	Washington
MS	Mississippi		

Abbreviations for Names of State Tests

AHSGE	Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3 rd Edition
AIMS	Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards
BST	Basic Skills Test (MN)
CAHSEE	California High School Exit Exam
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
GE	Gateway Examinations (TN)
GEE 21	Graduation Exit Examination for the 21 st Century (LA)
GHS GT	Georgia High School Graduation Tests

GQE	Graduation Qualifying Exam (IN)
HSA	Maryland High School Assessment
HSAP	High School Assessment Program (SC)
HSGQE	Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam
HSPA	High School Proficiency Assessment (NJ)
HSPE	Nevada High School Proficiency Examination
ISAT	Idaho Standards Achievement Tests
MCA	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
NCCTTCS	North Carolina Competency Tests and Tests of Computer Skills
NMHSCE	New Mexico High School Competency Examination
OGT	Ohio Graduation Tests
RCE	Regents Comprehensive Examinations (NY)
SATP	Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program
SOL	Standards of Learning End of Course Exams (VA)
TAKS	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
UBSCT	Utah Basic Skills Competency Test
WASL	Washington Assessment of Student Learning

Other Abbreviations

CEP	Center on Education Policy
ELA	English language arts
ELL	English language learner
EOC	End-of-course
FRPL	Free or reduced-price lunch
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized education program
LEP	Limited English proficient
MCE	Minimum competency exam
NA	Not available or not applicable
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
SBE	Standards-based exam

Chapter 2

Scope and Characteristics of State Exit Exams

KEY FINDINGS

Number of States with Exit Exams

- The number of states with exit exams has changed little since the Center reported on these policies last year. Only one additional state, Oklahoma, decided to add an exit exam, and none has dropped its exit exam requirement.
- With Oklahoma's recent decision to require students to pass end-of-course tests, 26 states—a bare majority of the states—now have exit exams or are preparing to implement them. This total includes 19 states that currently require students to pass exit exams and 7 states that plan to phase in mandatory exit exams during the next seven years.

Number of Students Affected

- High school exit exams are having a major impact on students. By 2012, about 72% of all American public school students will attend school in states with required exit exams. An estimated 82% of minority students, 71% of special education students, and 87% of English language learners will have to pass exit exams in coming years.
- Most states hold public school students to a higher level of test-based accountability than private school or home-schooled students. In 15 of the 25 states administering exit exams, private and home-schooled students are not required to pass exit exams to receive a diploma. The remaining 10 states require nonpublic school students to pass exit exams under certain circumstances.

Main Features of Exams

- Currently the vast majority of states with exit exams—16 out of 19—give either standards-based or end-of-course exams, rather than the minimum competency tests that predominated just three years ago. During the past year, four states shifted from minimum competency tests to either standards-based or end-of-course exams, and more states are considering making this shift in the future.

Uses of Exit Exams for Other Purposes

- Twenty states (up from 19 last year) use their exit exams to meet the high school testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Of these 20 states, 16 use the first administration of their exit exam for NCLB purposes. In 2007, 11 states plan to use the same science exam to award diplomas and meet the NCLB requirement for testing high school science.

- Nine states use different cut scores for NCLB proficiency than they do for graduation purposes. In seven of these states, the NCLB cut scores are higher than the cut scores needed to pass for graduation. Four states use only a subset of the items on their exit exams, rather than the whole test, for NCLB testing.
- Few states are using exit exams in college admissions decisions (three states), scholarship determinations (three states), or assessments of students' readiness for college (one state).

Requiring students to pass a test before they can receive a high school diploma remains a popular state strategy for reforming education. This chapter looks at the number of states with current or planned high school exit exams, the number of students affected by those exams, the main characteristics of these tests, and other uses for these tests. In general, the Center found that states are implementing exit exams on schedule and with relatively few changes in their key features. This stable implementation has helped build public support and increase public understanding of the role exit exams play in efforts to reform the nation's high schools.

NUMBER OF STATES WITH HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS

The number of states that require or plan to require students to pass a test to graduate from high school has remained fairly stable over the past year. As shown in **Figure 1**, 26 states—just one more than last year—have exit exams or are scheduled to implement them sometime during the next seven years. No state has cancelled its plans to require an exit exam, according to our survey, despite pockets of opposition to these tests and efforts by legislators in a few states to delay implementation or change the mandatory nature of the exams.

Figure 1—States with Mandatory Exit Exams

[Map of states]

States with mandatory exit exams in 2005 (dark shading): AL, AK, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (19 states)

States phasing in exit exams by 2012 but not yet withholding diplomas (medium shading): AZ (2006), CA (2006), ID (2006), MD (2009), OK (2012), UT (2006), WA (2008) (7 states)

All other states (light shading)

Figure reads: Alaska has a mandatory exit exam in 2005 and is withholding diplomas from students based on exam performance. Arizona is phasing in a mandatory exit exam and plans to begin withholding diplomas based on this exam in 2006. Connecticut does not have an exit exam, nor is it scheduled to implement one.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

As Figure 1 illustrates, 19 states currently have exit exams in place and are withholding diplomas based on these tests. Although this appears to be a decline from the 20 states that had exit exams in 2004, Maryland is a special case because it is making the transition to a new test. The class of 2004 was the last group of Maryland students required to pass the state's former minimum competency test to graduate. Maryland is switching to a new set of end-of-course exams but will not begin withholding diplomas until 2009.

A few states are considering changes to their exam policies but have not reached a decision. Missouri state officials continue to discuss the possibility of replacing the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) for high school students with a modified version of the ACT test. The state's High School Task Force, appointed by Commissioner Kent King, is talking about this possible shift as part of the larger debate on how to reform high schools. Missouri has already taken steps to increase requirements for high school graduation, but officials continue to debate the components of a successful high school reform strategy and whether an exit exam should be part of that strategy.

Seven states (including Maryland) are phasing in new exit exams and will begin withholding diplomas sometime between 2006 and 2012. The list of states and the years they plan to withhold diplomas are shown in Figure 1.

Oklahoma was the only state to add an exit exam requirement during the past year, effective for the graduating class of 2012. On June 7, 2005, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry signed into law the *Achieving Classroom Excellence* initiative. One part of this larger measure requires Oklahoma students to achieve a satisfactory or advanced score on four of six state end-of-course tests, beginning with the ninth grade class of 2008-09. Students who fail to reach the required score must be provided with remediation and retest opportunities until they pass the exams. Since this statute was enacted after the Center had completed its 2005 state survey, Oklahoma is not included in our survey totals, nor is it included in the state profiles at the end of this report. We will begin next year to track Oklahoma's implementation process, paying particular attention to the work of the Achieving Classroom Excellence Task Force, which was established to design and implement this new component of the state's assessment system.

States have adopted different strategies for phasing in exit exams. Some are developing and even administering the exams but will wait some time before withholding diplomas based on the tests. Maryland, for example, began developing and implementing its current exam in 1996 but will not begin withholding diplomas until 2009. Other states are giving the exams but will gradually raise the proficiency level required to pass the tests over time. In Idaho, for instance, students in the class of 2006 must pass the tests at the eighth grade level, those in the class of 2007 must pass at the ninth grade level, and those in the classes of 2008 and beyond must pass at the tenth grade or full passing level. These phase-in strategies give teachers, parents, and students time to adjust to the new exams and understand the real meaning of their consequences.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS AFFECTED BY EXIT EXAMS

Exit exams are becoming a common part of the American high school experience. If states stick with their current timetables for fully implementing exit exams, more than 72% of all American students enrolled in high school in 2012 will have to take exit exams to graduate, based on enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics. This is a dramatic increase over the 50% of public school students enrolled in states with exit exams in 2005. This projected increase is largely due to the phasing in of exit exams in more populous states such as California and Arizona.

Exit exams will have an even greater impact on minority students because many states with exit exams have higher than average minority enrollments. As shown in **Table 1**, an estimated 82% of minority students, 71% of special education students, and 87% of English language learners will have to pass exit examinations by 2012.

With so many students affected by these exams, policymakers will have to think carefully about the implementation of these exams, support efforts to study their impact on all types of students, and make mid-course corrections if necessary. In addition, policymakers should be very sure that the standards they are asking students to meet and the content they are testing are really important to students' future success.

Table 1—Percentage of Public School Students Enrolled in States with Exit Exams

Student Group	2005 (19 states)*	Projected for 2012 (26 states)*
All students	50%	72%
American Indian/Native Alaskan	31%	72%
Asian/Pacific Islander	37%	79%
Black	65%	77%
Hispanic	46%	87%
White	48%	65%
All minority students (American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Hispanic)	53%	82%
English language learners/limited English proficient students**	39%	87%
Students with individualized education programs	52%	71%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch**	49%	74%

*Estimates are based on 2002-03 data from NCES.

**Data from Tennessee were not available for these groups and were not included.

Table reads: In 2005, 50% of all public school students were enrolled in the 19 states with exit exams. By 2012, an estimated 72% will be enrolled in the 26 states scheduled to have exit exams at that point.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data from National Center for Education Statistics, 2003.

The data in Table 1 reflect only the number of *public* school students who attend school in states with exit exams and do not include private school or home-schooled students who will have to take exit exams. Fifteen of the 25 states with exit exams in place or in the planning stages do not require private school or home-schooled students to take the test to receive a diploma. The remaining 10 states do require one or both of these groups to pass the tests under certain circumstances, described in **Table 2**. These policies indicate that, in general, most states are holding public school high school students to a higher graduation standard and higher level of test-based accountability than students not enrolled in public schools.

In Nevada, for example, home-schooled students must take the test only if they want to be eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship program, which provides eligible Nevada residents with up to \$10,000 in scholarship funds during their first six years after high school graduation. Five states require private school students to take the exam if the private school is chartered or accredited by the state. Louisiana requires private school students to take the exam only if the school has the same graduation requirements as public schools and awards the state high school diploma to its students.

Table 2—State Policies for Testing Non-public School Students

State	Home-schooled Students	Private School Students	Neither
Alabama			•
Alaska			•
Arizona			•
California			•
Florida			•
Georgia			•
Idaho		• (If school is accredited by state)	
Indiana		• (If school is accredited)	
Louisiana		• (If school requires same graduation requirements as public schools and gives state high school diploma)	
Maryland*			•
Massachusetts			•
Minnesota			•
Mississippi			•
Nevada	• (If student wants to be eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship Program)		
New Jersey			•
New Mexico			•
New York		• (If school is accredited)	
North Carolina	•	•	
Ohio	• (Optional)	• (If school is chartered)	
South Carolina	•		
Tennessee		• (Category 1 schools only)	
Texas			•
Utah	•		
Virginia			•
Washington			•

State	Home-schooled Students	Private School Students	Neither
Total	5	7	15

Table reads: In Alabama, neither home-schooled nor private school students are required to pass the state exit exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

MAIN FEATURES OF EXIT EXAMS

The main features of state exit exams have remained much the same as last year, according to our 2005 state survey. The most notable trend is that a few more states have moved from using minimum competency exit exams to giving standards-based or end-of-course exams. **Table 3** lists the states with exit exams and summarizes the main characteristics of their exam. The table also notes which states had prior exit exams that have been or are being phased out.

Table 3—Major Characteristics of State Exit Exams

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class	Subjects Tested	Grade Level Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Prior High School Exit Exam/Test Being Phased Out
Alabama	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 3 rd Edition	2001	Math, reading, language, science, social studies	11 th	Standards-based	11 th	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 1 st and 2 nd Editions
Alaska	Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)	2004	Math, reading, writing	10 th	Minimum competency	10 th	None
Arizona	Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)	2006	Math, reading, writing	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	None
California	California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)	2006	Math (including algebra I), ELA	10 th	Standards-based	ELA (through 10 th), math (6 th –7 th), and algebra I	None
Florida	Florida Comprehensive	2003	Math and reading	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	High School Competency

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class	Subjects Tested	Grade Level Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Prior High School Exit Exam/Test Being Phased Out
	Assessment Test (FCAT)						Test (HSCT)
Georgia	Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT)	1994	Math, ELA, writing, science, social studies	11 th	Standards-based	11 th	Basic Skills Test
Idaho	Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT)	2006	Math, reading, language usage	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	None
Indiana	Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE)	2000	Math and ELA	10 th	Standards-based	9 th	None
Louisiana	Graduation Exit Examination for the 21 st Century (GEE 21)	2003	Math, ELA, science, social studies	ELA and math in 10 th ; social studies and science in 11 th	Standards-based	9 th -12 th	Graduation Exit Exam (GEE)
Maryland	Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)	2009	Algebra/data analysis, English II, biology, government	Varies	End-of-course	Course content	Maryland Functional Tests
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)	2003	Math and ELA	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	None
Minnesota	Basic Skills Test (BST)	2000	Math, reading, writing	Math and reading in 8 th ; writing in 10 th	Minimum competency	None	None
Mississippi	Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)	2003	Algebra I, English II (with writing component), biology, U.S. history from 1877	Varies	End-of-course	Subject content alignment	Functional Literacy Examination (FLE)
Nevada	Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)	2003	Math, reading, writing, science (2009)	10 th	Standards-based	8 th -12 th	High School Proficiency Exam (based on 1994 state

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class	Subjects Tested	Grade Level Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Prior High School Exit Exam/Test Being Phased Out
							course of study)
New Jersey	High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)	2003	Math, language arts literacy, science (2007)	11 th	Standards-based	11 th	High School Proficiency Test-11
New Mexico	New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)	1990	Math, reading, language arts, science, social studies, composition	10 th	Minimum competency	None	None
New York	Regents Comprehensive Examinations	2000	Math, English, science, global history and geography, U.S. history and government	Varies	End-of-course	9 th -12 th	Regents Competency Tests
North Carolina	North Carolina Competency Tests and Tests of Computer Skills	1982	Math, reading comprehension, computer skills	Reading and math in 9 th ; computer skills in 8 th	Standards-based	8 th	None
Ohio	Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT)	2005 (reading & math) 2006 (other subjects)	Math, reading, writing, social studies, science	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	9 th Grade Proficiency Tests
South Carolina	High School Assessment Program (HSAP)	2006	Math, ELA	10 th	Standards-based	Through 10 th	Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP)
Tennessee	Gateway Examinations	2005	Algebra I, biology I, English II	Varies	End-of-course	10 th	Tennessee Competency Test
Texas	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)	2005	Math, ELA, science, social studies	11 th	Standards-based	High school subjects	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)
Utah	Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT)	2006	Math, reading, writing	10 th	Minimum competency	6 th -10 th	None
Virginia	Standards of Learning End of Course Exams (SOL)	2004	1 Math, English: writing, English:	Varies	End-of-course	Content aligned	Literacy Passport Test

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class	Subjects Tested	Grade Level Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Prior High School Exit Exam/Test Being Phased Out
			reading, 1 science, 1 history/social science, and 1 student- selected test				
Washington	Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	2008	Math, reading, writing, science (2010)	10 th	Standards-based	10 th	None

Table reads: Alaska currently administers the Alaska High School Qualifying Exam (HSGQE). for which consequences began for the class of 2004. The exam tests math, reading, and writing in grade 10 and is considered by the state to be a minimum competency exam aligned to tenth grade standards. It does not replace any prior exit exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Types of Tests

As in past years, the Center has grouped state exit exams into the following three categories, based on states' own descriptions of their tests:

- *Minimum competency exams*, which generally focus on basic skills below the high school level
- *Standards-based exams*, which are aligned with state standards and are generally targeted at the high school level
- *End-of-course exams*, which are aimed at assessing whether students have mastered the content of specific courses at the high school level; these EOC exams are usually standards-based, and students take each test after completing a specific course

As shown in **Figure 2**, states are continuing to move away from the reputedly easier minimum competency tests toward more challenging standards-based and end-of-course exams, a trend we noted in past years' reports. The number of states requiring students to pass minimum competency exams to graduate has declined from 10 in 2002 to 7 in 2004 and to 3 in 2005. Meanwhile, the number of states using standards-based exit exams has grown from 7 in 2002 to 10 in 2004 and to 12 in 2005. The number giving end-of-course exams has edged up from two in 2002 to three in 2003 and to four in 2005. In other words, during the past year, four states shifted from minimum competency tests to either standards-based or end-of-course exams. Most of the states phasing in new exit exams during the next four years plan to use standards-based or end-of-course tests; only Utah expects to introduce a minimum competency exam. If states proceed as intended, by 2009, 3 states will be giving minimum competency exams, 17 will be using standards-based exams, and 5 will be administering end-of-course exams.

Figure 2—Types of Exit Exams States Are Using or Plan to Use

[Maps of states]

MCE – Minimum competency exam focused on basic skills below the high school level

SBE – Standards-based exam aligned with state standards and targeted at the high school level

EOC – End-of-course exam tied to a specific course at the high school level

In 2002 (out of 18 states)

MCE: FL, MD, MN, MS, NV, NM, OH, SC, TN, VA (10 states)

SBE: AL, GA, IN, LA, NJ, NC, TX* (7 states)

EOC: NY, TX* (2 states)

*In 2002, Texas gave students the option to pass either an SBE or an EOC exam.

In 2005 (out of 19 states)

MCE: AK, MN, NM, (3 states)

SBE: AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, NC, NJ, NV, OH, SC, TX (12 states)

EOC: MS, NY, TN, VA (4 states)

By 2009 (out of 25 states)

MCE: AK, MN, UT (3 states)

SBE: AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MA, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, SC, TX, WA (17 states)

EOC: MD, MS, NY, TN, VA (5 states)

Figure reads: In 2002, 10 states required students to pass a minimum competency exam to receive a high school diploma, while 7 states administered standards-based exit exams and only 2 used end-of-course exams. In 2005, just 3 states were continuing to use minimum competency tests as their exit exam, while 12 states were giving standards-based exams and 4 states were using end-of-course exams. By 2009, only three states will be administering minimum competency exit exams, while the remainder will use standards-based or end-of-course exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

In addition to the states shown in Figure 2 that plan to institute EOCs by 2009, two other states have taken recent steps in this direction. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, the North Carolina state board of education recently approved the use of the state's current end-of-course tests as a graduation requirement starting in 2010. Georgia may follow suit with its existing EOC exams. The movement among states to replace current competency tests with a series of end-of-course exams may indicate a preference for EOCs among policymakers, who tend to view them as more rigorous than the current exit exams (Southern Regional Education Board, 2004; Silberman, 2005). A study by the Southern Regional Education Board (2004) suggested that end-of-course exams are more effective than competency-based tests in promoting consistent instruction statewide because they “set a concrete standard for student performance in core courses and enable teachers to focus on teaching the knowledge and skills” covered in the end-of-course exams. Some have also argued that EOC exams can also test more complex learning characteristics better than standards-based exams.

Subject Areas

All states with exit exams assess students in the two main areas of English language arts and mathematics. As noted in last year's report, several states have introduced or plan to introduce exit exams in science and social studies, as well. By 2010, 14 states plan to assess science and 11 expect to test social studies, as depicted in **Figure 3**. The adoption of exit exams in science may be spurred in part by the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states to test high school students in science by 2007-08; however, NCLB does not require these science tests to be used for graduation purposes.

Figure 3—Subject Area Tests That Students Must Pass to Graduate

[Bar graphs]

In 2002 (out of 18 states)

English language arts: AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18 states)

Mathematics: All 18 states

Science: AL, GA, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX (7 states)

Social studies: GA, NM, NY, OH, TX (5 states)

Computer skills: NC (1 state)

In 2005 (out of 19 states)

English language arts: AL, AK, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (19 states)

Mathematics: All 19 states

Science: AL, GA, LA, MS, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX, VA (10 states)

Social studies: AL, GA, LA, MS, NM, NY, OH, TX, VA (9 states)

Computer skills: NC (1 state)

By 2009 (out of 25 states)

English language arts: AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (25 states)

Mathematics: All 25 states

Science: AL, GA, LA, MD, MA, MS, NV, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX, VA, WA (14 states)*

Social studies: AL, GA, LA, MD, MA, MS, NM, NY, OH, TX, VA (11 states)

Computer skills: NC (1 state)

Figure reads: In 2002, all 18 states with exit exams tested English language arts and mathematics, while 7 states, including Alabama, tested science, and 5 states, including Georgia, tested social studies. By 2009, all 25 states with exit exams will test students in English language arts and mathematics, and 11 states will assess in social studies.

*Twelve states will assess students in science in 2009, and Massachusetts and Washington will begin testing science in 2010.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Types of Test Questions

In 2005, all states used multiple-choice questions on their exit exams, but only two states, Alabama and Tennessee, relied solely on this format. Most states, 16 of the 19 with current exit exams, also had students write a passage in response to a writing prompt (**see Figure 4**). Compared with 2002, more states are using short-answer and other types of extended-response questions. An exception is Mississippi, which replaced some open-ended questions on its exit exam with additional multiple-choice items. As of August 2005, the four main graduation tests in Mississippi will consist entirely of multiple-choice items. The English test still includes a writing component, however. Among states phasing in new exit exams, several intend to include writing prompts, short-answer items, or extended-response questions, as shown by the 2009 data in Figure 4.

Figure 4—Types of Test Questions on State Exit Exams

[Bar graphs]

In 2002 (out of 18 states)

Multiple-choice: AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18 states)

Short-answer: AK, FL, IN, LA, MA, MS, NJ, NM, NY (9 states)

Writing prompt: AK, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (17 states)

Other extended-response: FL, MA, MS, NM, NY, NC (6 states)

In 2005 (out of 19 states)

Multiple-choice: AL, AK, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NJ, NM, NV, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (19 states)

Short-answer: AK, FL, IN, LA, MA, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TX (11 states)

Writing prompt: AK, GA, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TX, VA (16 states)

Other extended-response: FL, MA, NM, NY, NC (5 states)

By 2009 (out of 25 states)

Multiple-choice: AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (25 states)

Short-answer: AK, FL, IN, LA, MD, MA, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TX, WA (13 states)

Writing prompt: AK, AZ, CA, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TX, UT, VA, WA (20 states)

Other extended-response – FL, MD, MA, NM, NY, NC, SC, WA (8 states)

Figure reads: In 2005, 16 states, among them Indiana, included writing prompts on their exit exams. By 2009, 20 states, among them Arizona, expect to include writing prompts on their exit exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

USING EXIT EXAMS FOR OTHER PURPOSES

As mentioned in last year's report, states are exploring whether and how to use exit exams for other purposes—not only to save resources and cut down on testing, but also to create a more cohesive and integrated testing system. Several states are using exit exams to meet the high school testing requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which continues to be the most dominant force in educational testing today. Some states are also using exit exams to assist in college admissions and scholarship determinations and to assess knowledge and skills gained through high school courses. Few states are using exit exams to determine college or workforce readiness.

Complying with No Child Left Behind

Since its enactment in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act has exerted an enormous impact on state testing policies. The Act requires school districts, by no later than 2005-06, to annually test all students in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math and test secondary school students at least once in these subjects between grades 10 and 12. Testing in science will become a requirement for NCLB in 2007-08. States determine which tests will be used to meet the Act's demands.

NCLB testing brings serious consequences for schools and districts. Test scores form the backbone of a federally mandated accountability system that aims to identify which schools and districts are not doing a good job of educating students. Schools and districts identified through this process are subject to increasingly stiff sanctions, ranging from the loss of students to better-performing schools under the law's parent choice provisions to massive restructuring or takeover by the state or a private management company. In some schools, NCLB testing also affects students and parents by changing how students are taught and prepared for the exams increasing the pressure on students to perform well on NCLB-required tests, expanding families' opportunities for school choice (where choices exist) and tutoring services, expanding parents' access to information about school performance, and in other ways.

NCLB does not require states to have exit exams—the law takes no position on whether the tests used to meet its high school testing mandates should have graduation consequences for students. Still, NCLB is influencing state decisions about exit exams. Most states with high school exit exams have elected to use these same exams for NCLB accountability at the high school level, and those that make this choice must ensure that their exit exams comply with federal testing provisions.

Number of states using exit exams for NCLB

The number of states using the same exam to comply with NCLB accountability requirements and award diplomas rose from 19 states last year to 20 states this year; the 5 remaining states use different exams for NCLB. **Table 4** summarizes state policies for using exit exams for NCLB purposes.

Table 4—State Policies for Using Exit Exams for NCLB Accountability

State	Exit Exam Used for NCLB Accountability	Year First Used	Exit Exam Used for NCLB Science 07-08	Administration for NCLB Accountability	Part of Exam Used	Same Cut Score Used for Diploma and NCLB
Alabama	Yes	2003-04	Yes	11 th grade spring	Entire exam	No
Alaska	Yes	2002-03	No*	First	Entire exam	Yes
Arizona	Yes	2001-02	No*	First	Entire exam	Yes
California	Yes	2002-03	No*	First	Entire exam	No
Florida	Yes	2002-03	No*	All 10 th grade administrations	Entire exam	No
Georgia	Yes	2003-04	Yes	First	Subset of items	No
Idaho	Yes	2002-03	TBD	First	No response	No
Indiana	Yes	2002-03	No*	First	Entire exam	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	2002-03	Yes	First	Entire exam	No
Maryland	Yes**	2004-05	Yes	First	Entire exam	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	2002-03	No	First	Entire exam	No
Minnesota	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mississippi	Yes	2002-03	Yes	First	Subset of items	No
Nevada	Yes	2003-04	Yes	First and first retest	Entire exam	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	2003-04	Yes*	First	Entire exam	Yes
New Mexico	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
New York	Yes	2002-03	Yes	Final retest	Entire exam	Yes
North Carolina	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Ohio	Yes	2003-04	Yes	First	Entire exam	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	2003-04	TBD	First	Entire exam	No
Tennessee	Yes	2002-03	Yes	First	Entire exam	Yes
Texas	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Utah	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Virginia	Yes	2002-03	Yes	First	Entire exam	Yes
Washington	Yes	2002-03	Yes*	First	Subset of items	Yes in 2008

* Currently these states do not test in science as part of their exit exam system. If they plan to add a science test to be used for both purposes, they have been counted as Yes's.

**This year, Maryland started using the HSA English 2 test as the state's grade 10 reading assessment for NCLB, and in 2007, the HSA biology assessment will be used to meet the science testing requirements of NCLB for students in grades 10-12. Maryland tests mathematics for NCLB purposes with the Maryland School Assessment in geometry, an end-of-course exam that students must take but are not required to pass in order to graduate.

NA = Not applicable
TBD = To be determined

Table reads: In Arizona, the state exit exam is used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act and was first used for this purpose in 2001-02. The state is not using the exit exam for the NCLB science testing requirement in 2007-08. The first administration of the exam counts for NCLB accountability purposes, and the entire exam is used. The state uses the same cut score to award diplomas as to determine NCLB proficiency.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Using the same test for both graduation testing and NCLB purposes can help streamline the testing process by minimizing the amount of time students and teachers spend preparing for and taking the tests and by saving the money the state would have to spend to develop, update, and administer a second examination. Maryland will see some of these benefits. In 2004-05, the state started using its English 2 High School Assessment as the grade 10 reading assessment for NCLB, and in 2007 it plans to use the HSA biology assessment to meet the NCLB science testing requirement. For federal accountability purposes in math, however, Maryland continues to use an end-of-course exam in geometry; students must take this test, which is part of the Maryland School Assessment series, but they do not have to pass it in order to graduate.

Conversely, financial considerations affected North Carolina's decision *not* to use its exit exam for NCLB purposes. Officials in the state department of education examined the changes that would be needed in its exit exam to meet NCLB requirements and concluded that the necessary revisions—including adjusting the test so it would generate separate reading and mathematics scores—would take at least three years and cost about \$4 million (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2005). In light of this expense, the state department recommended to the state board of education that North Carolina use its existing end-of-course exams as an additional high school graduation requirement, wait for the U.S. Department of Education to approve the EOC exams for NCLB accountability, and leave the current competency exit exam unchanged.

Of the remaining four states that use different tests for graduation and NCLB, three of them administer minimum competency exams that do not meet NCLB requirements. In Minnesota and New Mexico, exit exams are not aligned to state standards, as required by NCLB; in addition, the Minnesota exit exam is given to students beginning in eighth grade, rather than in the NCLB high school testing grades of 10-12. Utah's exit exams are aligned to standards for grades 6-9. Texas has TAKS exams for both grades 10 and 11; the grade 10 exam is used for NCLB, and the grade 11 exam is used for graduation. Although the tenth and eleventh grade exams test the same objectives, the state may have moved to an eleventh grade exit exam to allow students more time to master the high school curriculum. The state also indicated that the grade 10 exam is meant to inform schools and students about academic content areas in which students may need additional support to succeed on the grade 11 exit exam.

In last year's report, we mentioned a concern that using the same exam for both NCLB and graduation purposes could have unintended consequences or create perverse incentives. When schools are held accountable for student performance, as they are with NCLB, they might feel added pressure to nudge students who are low performers to drop out or transfer to improve the school's average test scores. Our trepidation stemmed in part from a report in Florida, where the state department of education investigated 159 schools statewide (including some high schools) that transferred 5% or more of their students just before the FCAT was administered (Rubin, 2004). However, the state investigation cleared all schools of any wrongdoing (Dunn, 2004; Times Staff Writer, 2004). NCLB requires state accountability systems to use graduation rates as an additional indicator of high school performance, so eventually these data could help identify whether increased dropout or transfer rates seem to be an outcome of exit exams. The issue of perverse incentives under NCLB and the impact of exit exams on dropout rates and transfers remains a concern and deserves further study.

Of the 20 states that are using exit exams for NCLB accountability, 12 began using their exit exams for NCLB in the 2002-03 school year. Six states began using exit exams for NCLB in 2003-04, and Maryland started using one of its exit exam components in 2004-05. Arizona, which was already administering the AIMS when NCLB became a requirement, began using its exit exam for federal accountability in 2001-02.

In 2007-08, 11 states plan to use their exit exam in science to meet the NCLB requirement for testing high school science. Washington State's science test will be used for NCLB in 2007-08 but will not become a graduation requirement until 2010; similarly, Massachusetts is developing end-of-course science tests that will be required for graduation in 2010. New Jersey currently does not test in science but will add a science test to its exit exam system in 2007. Idaho has not decided whether to use the science section of the ISAT to meet NCLB.

Deciding which test administration and which items to use for NCLB

Since students are allowed to retake exit exams, states must decide which administration of the exam "counts" for NCLB purposes. In 16 of the 20 states using exit exams for NCLB, the first administration of the test is or will be used to meet the federal requirements. Shown in Table 4, these states include Alaska, Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington. Alabama plans to use the grade 11 spring administration of its exit exam for NCLB; the test is first administered in grade 10 but does not count for graduation purposes until the grade 11 administration. Florida and Nevada plan to use a cumulative approach: Florida will count the percentage of students who have passed all administrations in grade 10, and Nevada will use a percentage of students who have passed either the first administration or the first retest. New York will use the final administration of the test.

Sixteen states plan to use the entire exit exam for NCLB testing; they are listed in Table 4. Three states (Georgia, Mississippi, and Washington) plan to use a subset of items from their exit exam for NCLB testing. Idaho did not respond to this question. Our study did not look specifically at the levels and standards tested for NCLB versus those tested for graduation, so we can only speculate about why some states are not using all items. States may have chosen to use

a subset of items for NCLB because certain items might be more appropriate for different purposes. The state could have different expectations for student-level accountability than for NCLB school- and district-level accountability, since the stakes for students are different. Just because states are excluding certain items from NCLB accountability does not necessarily mean they are setting lower standards for NCLB proficiency, although it may appear that way and be difficult to defend. Certain items simply might not fit particular NCLB requirements.

Same or different cut scores

Our survey also revealed that 11 states are using or plan to use the same cut scores to determine whether a student should graduate as for NCLB accountability; they include Alaska, Arizona, Indiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington. Nine states will use different cut scores for graduation than for NCLB accountability, including Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Although the different objectives and stakes attached to graduation testing and NCLB testing may warrant different cut scores in the view of these states, this policy could be confusing for educators and the public and difficult to justify, since a student can pass a state's exit exam yet not be considered proficient under NCLB. That situation could imply low expectations for exit exam purposes in some minds.

In seven states (Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and South Carolina), the cut scores that signify proficient performance for NCLB are currently set higher than the cut scores for graduation purposes. Alabama, to cite one example, has established an advanced level of performance for NCLB proficiency that exceeds the passing score for awarding diplomas. Similarly, Louisiana students must achieve at the state's basic level of performance to be considered proficient for NCLB, while they need only reach the "approaching basic" level or above to receive a diploma. And in California, the proficient level for NCLB is a 380 scale score for both math and English language arts, while the passing level for graduation is 350 for both subjects. South Carolina and Florida students must score at level 3 on the exam to meet the NCLB proficiency standard but need only score at level 2 or above to graduate.

Georgia did not specify what the differences were in its scores for graduation and NCLB. Idaho is taking a gradual approach; the state eventually plans use the same cut score for both graduation and NCLB purposes but is using lower cut scores for graduation for the classes of 2006 and 2007.

Pass rates as NCLB accountability indicators

At least 11 states use the percentage of students passing exit exams as one criterion in their accountability systems; these states include Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. (Two states did not provide information on additional accountability measures.) Typically, exit exam pass rates are one of several criteria used in these accountability systems to identify low- or high-performing schools and to target supports or sanctions accordingly.

Making College Admissions and Scholarship Decisions

Alabama, Texas, and New York are the only states to report that some of their public universities and community colleges use exit exams for admissions purposes. Two other states, Utah and Washington, said that university officials and state department of education staff were discussing the use of exit exam results in the admissions process. Ohio reported that public universities have not yet decided if they will use the Ohio Graduation Test scores for admissions or other decisions.

Only three states—Georgia, Maryland, and Washington—reported that exit exam scores are included in students' high school transcripts. Recent developments in Washington suggest that placing exit exam scores on student transcripts could help motivate students to take the exams seriously. Although the class of 2008 will be the first required to pass the WASL to graduate, some high school juniors are already retaking the WASL just to boost their scores, in the hopes of enhancing their college admission chances (Stevick & Slage, 2005). However, this might only motivate already high-achieving or college bound students.

Three states are using exit exam scores to inform decisions about college scholarships, a strategy that could encourage some students, especially those who do not find the exams challenging, to take the tests more seriously. In Arizona and Massachusetts, high scores on exit exams serve as one criterion in awarding tuition waivers for state colleges and universities (and in the case of Massachusetts, for public community colleges as well). Massachusetts students can even retake the MCAS to try to earn higher scores to qualify for the tuition waivers. Nevada's Millennium Scholarship awards up to \$10,000 to students attending any institution within the state university and community college system or Sierra Nevada College. Created in 1999, the scholarship is available to students who pass all areas of the HSPE and earn at least a 3.1 grade point average based on all high school credit-granting courses. In Washington, officials at public colleges and universities have discussed using WASL scores as one criterion for awarding scholarships, and a private university in the Seattle area has announced it will offer scholarships to students with high scores on the WASL math and science tests.

Assessing College Readiness

Although several states have considered using exit exams to determine whether students are ready for college, little to no policy change has occurred in this area. In last year's exit exam study, we found that states did not expect their exit exams to be assessments of college readiness. Admittedly, determining whether a student has reached the basic skill levels required of a high school graduate and validating whether a student is prepared for college are two different purposes, so the lack of action is not surprising. Texas is the only state that specifically links the state exit exam and college readiness, and this stems from a state law requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish standards on the TAKS exit-level mathematics and English language arts tests that indicate a student is ready to enroll in a postsecondary institution. In 2004, the board set college readiness levels at 2200 on the mathematics assessment and 2200 on the English language arts assessment, with a minimum of a 3 on the written composition. (These scores fall between "met the standard" and "commended performance" on the achievement levels set for graduation purposes.)

Our 2005 survey asked states whether they are developing any college readiness exams, including assessments that are separate from their exit exams. Beside the aforementioned example in Texas, we found that only Maryland is currently working on a pilot project to create a college readiness exam in math. Although the remaining 23 states with high school exit exams reported no statewide college readiness exams, several states have had policy discussions on this topic.

Information from Massachusetts points to the difficulties of using exit exams to assess college readiness. Using data from Accuplacer, a common college placement test developed by the College Board, North Essex Community College examined the need for remedial math and English among students who passed the MCAS and found that these students are not much better prepared for college than their predecessors who were not required to take an exit exam (Trenchil, 2005). This study also noted that with MCAS assessing competency at the grade 7-9 levels, the test cannot accurately evaluate college readiness.

It remains to be seen whether states will embrace the goal of making high school exit exams into useful tools for reaching higher education decisions and will adjust their exams accordingly. For now, more research of the sort conducted in Massachusetts should be done to assess how current exit exams relate to students' remediation needs and success in the first year of college. Also, state departments of education and higher education officials should engage in discussions about whether or how exit exams could be made more useful for higher education decisions.

Assessing Employment Readiness

As mentioned in last year's report, Georgia is the only state listing workforce and college readiness as an official purpose of its exit exam. In New York, the Board of Regents is considering piloting a test to ensure graduates have basic workplace skills. This test would assess 10 broad skills that business groups say are critical in entry-level positions. Employers are pushing for the certification, complaining that even with Regents exams, high school graduates are unprepared for work. In Indiana, however, manufacturers noted that the math skills of entry-level workers have improved since the introduction of a more rigorous state exit exam (Berggoetz, 2004).

Assessing Course Knowledge

Our 2005 survey also asked states whether they had end-of-course exams that were not required for graduation. Our goal was to determine whether states had a means other than exit exams to assess students' academic achievement. Eight states reported that they administer end-of-course exams that are not exit exams, including California, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah. Two additional states, Maryland and North Carolina, have EOCs that are not yet exit exams but are proposed to become graduation requirements in the coming years. Massachusetts and New Mexico are developing end-of-course tests that will not be required for graduation. **Table 5** shows the states that reported using or piloting end-of-course exams, along with the subjects covered. Most of these states have developed end-of-course

exams in a range of subjects, while three have focused specifically on math (Maryland, New Mexico, and Texas) and one (Massachusetts) on science.

The increase in the number of states using end-of-course exams in addition to exit exams could reflect a movement by many states to better assess college readiness, since most state officials note that exit exams are not generally good measures of whether a student is prepared to enter college. Alternately, these states may see the EOC exams as a strategy to continue to challenge high-achieving students who have already passed exit exams, since more than half of the states with exit exams administer these tests in grade 10. Massachusetts and Maryland have found EOC exams to be helpful in meeting federal accountability guidelines: Maryland's geometry test is used to meet the math requirements of NCLB, and Massachusetts' planned science test will be used for NCLB purposes.

Table 5—States with End-of-course Exams

State	End-of-course Exam Currently Required for Graduation	End-of-course Exam Proposed as Graduation Requirement	End-of-course Exam Not Required for Graduation
California			Math, English language arts, science, history, social science
Georgia		*	Grade 9 literature, American literature, algebra, geometry, U.S. history, economics, physical science, biology
Idaho			Districts decide whether they will use state-developed EOC exams
Indiana			Algebra I and English II; tests are also being piloted in algebra II, biology I, and U.S. history.
Maryland		English II, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government in 2009	Geometry
Massachusetts			Developed but not in use until 2010: biology, chemistry, intro physics, and science/technology
Mississippi	Algebra I, biology I, English II, and U.S. history from 1877		
New Mexico			Developing a pilot test in math in 2006
New York	English, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and one of the following sciences: earth science, living environment, chemistry, and physics		
North Carolina		Algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, and biology in 2010	
South Carolina			Algebra/mathematics for the

State	End-of-course Exam Currently Required for Graduation	End-of-course Exam Proposed as Graduation Requirement	End-of-course Exam Not Required for Graduation
			technologies, English, biology/applied biology, and physical science; piloting U.S. history in 2006
Tennessee	Algebra I, biology I, and English II		Geometry, chemistry, algebra II, math foundations, English I, U.S. history, and physical science
Texas			Algebra
Utah			Reading, language arts, math, and science
Virginia	English: writing; English: reading; one test each in mathematics, history, and science; and one test of student's own choosing from the following options: algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to the present, U.S. history, and world geography		

*Georgia is exploring using its end-of-course tests as a possible replacement for the GHSGT.

Note: States with no current or proposed EOC exams are not included.

Table reads: California administers end-of-course exams in math, English language arts, science, history, and social science, but these tests are not a graduation requirement.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Chapter 3

Reactions to and Changes in State Exit Exam Policies

KEY FINDINGS

Media Reactions

- During the past year, media coverage of exit exams tended to focus on a handful of states in which officials have changed course or appeared indecisive about exit exams. In many states, however, exit exams seem relatively uncontroversial and have attracted little media attention.

Public Reactions

- Exit exams have become a focus of public opposition or support in California, Arizona, and a few other states where policymakers were considering changing exam policies, and in Washington, where an election was held for a new chief state school officer. In several states, business groups spoke out in favor of exit exams, while teacher organizations and some parent groups opposed them.

State Policy Changes

- Most of the changes in state exit exam policies over the past 18 months could be called fine-tuning rather than overhauls. In fact, California and a few other states held the line against making more dramatic changes, such as delaying the graduation testing mandate or doing away with the exit exam altogether.
- Several states seem to be beefing up their policies to help students pass exit exams. The most common change, reported by 11 states, was adding new statewide funding or programs for remediation and test preparation.
- Some states made policy changes that, although modest, will likely make it easier for students to pass exit exams. Arizona, Tennessee, and Washington lowered their passing scores slightly in some subjects, while Maryland developed an alternative scoring method that will allow students to compensate for a below-passing score in one subject test with an above-passing score in another, as long as students meet a specific combined score for all four tests and the minimum score for each test. Arizona also adopted a policy to increase students' exit exam scores by up to 25% if they earn A, B, or C grades in key academic courses. Seven states expanded alternative routes to a diploma for students struggling to pass exit exams.
- In 2005, North Carolina and Minnesota took action to make their exams more challenging. The North Carolina state board decided to require students to pass end-of-course exams in five subjects, rather than its current standards-based exams in three subjects. Minnesota decided to replace the state's Basic Skills Test, administered in

grades 8 and 10, with more rigorous assessments to be given in grades 9, 10, and 11. The new test, the GRAD test, will be first administered in 2008 and will be based on the state's standards.

Because exit exams hold such high stakes for students, they have attracted media scrutiny and public opposition in some states. The responses of the media and the public carry weight because exit exams cannot survive without public support—which is shaped partly by media coverage. Moreover, both the media and the public can play an important role by calling attention to aspects of exit exams that are not working well and may need to be addressed through policy changes. Still, the extent of media coverage about exit exams is not necessarily an accurate gauge of how much the public supports these tests or how effectively state officials are implementing test policies.

How policymakers respond to media attention and public controversy is a key part of the implementation process for exit exams. Our study suggests for exit exams to survive and thrive, policymakers must be willing to monitor their effects and make policy changes to address implementation problems. But deciding how much to change and what to change is no simple matter. A fine line exists between making necessary modifications and watering down requirements so much that they no longer produce the intended result. Similarly, holding firm to give policies time to work can turn into a stubborn refusal to acknowledge that a policy is not working. In many of the states there is a definite feeling of “making it up as we go along.” While this is not necessarily bad, particularly in a democracy where input and debate is important, it leads to much of the policy churn that occurs. The state development processes that create these exams are not highly rational. They are very contingency-based and negotiated both in terms of the processes themselves and the ultimate results. It is also important to note that, for states with a strong history of local control, they can lack the experience of managing these tests and all the attendant processes, including public communication and public relations, that accompany them.

This chapter begins by reviewing media coverage and public responses to exit exams during the past year. The remainder of the chapter describes the main types of changes states have made in their exit exam policies over the past year or so and the implications of these changes.

PRESS COVERAGE OF EXIT EXAMS

As part of this study of exit exams, the Center on Education Policy tracks media stories on exit exams nationally. **Box 1** gives a small sample of typical headlines from news articles about exit exams and shows that, in general, the headlines tend not to highlight the good news.

Box 1—Selected Headlines about Exit Exams

Negative

Math lies at the root of failures on HSPA

—B. McCarron, *New Jersey Star-Ledger*, Oct. 7, 2004

Racial test gap persists, state figures show

—E. Gootman, *New York Times*, March 10, 2005

Dallas area seniors stuck in no-passing zone

—T. Hobbs, *Dallas Morning News*, May 20, 2005

State deems failing grades good enough to pass AIMS

—P. Kossan, *Arizona Republic*, May 13, 2005.

Low-grade math kids get “pass” on Regents

—D. Andreatta, *New York Post*, Jan 27, 2005

Lawsuit: Some tests are unfair

—R. Gonzales, *Burbank Leader*, June 4, 2005

Positive

Students do better on Md. exams

—N. Trejos, *Washington Post*, September 15, 2004

AIMS pressure isn't raising dropout rates

—P. Kossan, *Arizona Republic*, June 14, 2005

Source: Center on Education Policy, drawn from news reports as noted.

Most of the press coverage of exit exams during the past year has centered on a handful of states. Of the 25 states with current or planned mandatory exit exams, a great deal of media attention has focused on a few states—Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Washington. This could be because the media in these states does a more thorough or active job of covering education testing issues. Or it could be because issues have emerged in these states that have attracted more attention or generated more controversy, such as low minority pass rates, high dropout rates, changes in cut scores, or efforts to postpone tests. Also, press coverage is obviously more intensive in states like Washington or California that have just introduced exit exams or will soon begin to withhold diplomas. It is important to note that these are also populous states, with more newspapers and more education writers, so it's likely that more articles on this topic will appear in the local press.

Although low pass rates, persistent achievement gaps, and other issues related to exit exams are clearly worthy of investigation and public attention, the flurry of media stories in a few states could imply a greater degree of public outrage than actually exists. In many states, exit exams seem relatively uncontroversial and have drawn little media attention. Less coverage has occurred in states with exit exams that have been in place for years and have blended into the educational landscape.

Our review of media coverage during the past year suggests that press attention has been focused mostly on states in which education officials or political leaders have postponed exams, changed cut scores, changed requirements, or otherwise exhibited indecision about the exit exam. This was the case in California, where bills were introduced in the legislature to again delay the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement, but these measures did not pass (Sanders, 2005). In New York, state officials first postponed a raise in the cut score, and then went ahead with it (Andreatta, 2004).

The state that received the most attention during the past year was Arizona, where state policymakers continued to debate changes in the AIMS exam, which had already been postponed twice as a graduation requirement. Moreover, test scores released in August 2004 indicated that 61% of sophomores had failed the mathematics portion of the test and 41% had failed the reading portion (Kossan & Konig, 2004). This set off a chain of events that was covered extensively by the *Arizona Republic* and reported in other media (Scutari, 2005; Kossan, 2005b; Madrid, 2005; Yara, 2005; Kossan, 2005d; Davenport, 2005; Kossan, Sparks & Carr, 2005):

- In December 2004, the state board of education set a policy allowing students who fail the AIMS to continue to take it after the twelfth grade.
- In January 2005, the state made available \$10 million to districts to pay for extra tutoring for students who had not passed the AIMS.
- In January 2005, a prominent state senator introduced a bill to end AIMS as a graduation requirement.
- In February 2005, the state's attorney general issued an opinion that resulted in the state waiving the exit exam requirement for special education students.
- In May 2005, a state panel voted to lower the exam's cut score from 72% correct to 59% correct in reading and from 71% correct to 60% correct in math.
- In May 2005, the Arizona legislature voted to ease the AIMS requirement by factoring students' grades into their AIMS scores.
- By May 2005, it was discovered that districts had used less than one-tenth of the funds the state made available for tutoring in January.

After publishing a string of stories on the changes to Arizona's exit exam, the *Republic's* commentators observed that that the state's political leadership, formerly supportive of the tests, now seemed to be changing its mind and backtracking in light of the low initial pass rates. One columnist charged that "policymakers in Arizona have never thought straight about a testing regimen from the beginning" and noted that the eased requirements meant that a high school senior could get more than half the items wrong on a sophomore level test and still graduate (Robb, 2005). The continuous media coverage of AIMS may have played a role in an apparent decline in public support for exit exams in this state, described in the next section.

PUBLIC OPPOSITION AND SUPPORT

Over the past year, a few new groups have formed in opposition to exit exams, and in California one group did have some legislative success. The Coalition for Educational Justice was formed in support of two bills pending in the legislature to postpone the California exit exam or develop alternatives to it. Neither bill passed but, as described later in this chapter, supporters succeeded in passing a watered-down bill to compel the state to acknowledge or address inequities in the California school system, in terms of availability of textbooks, credentialed teachers, and other measures (Helfand & Bailey, 2005; Sanders, 2005).

In Massachusetts, a group of teachers and university professors called the Massachusetts Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education formed to oppose Governor Mitt Romney's proposal to speed up the introduction of new MCAS science tests. The group claimed that preparation for the science test would detract from hands-on lab time. A state official brushed aside these concerns and called the group "nervous Nellies" (Ebbert, 2005).

In Washington State, the WASL exit exam, which is due to count as a graduation requirement for the class of 2008, emerged as one of the most salient issues during the 2004 political race for state superintendent for public instruction. Incumbent Terry Bergeson took a stance in favor of the WASL. The founder of an opposition group, Juanita Doyon of Mothers Against WASL, ran for the office but was defeated in the primary by Judith Billings, who formerly held the state superintendent position and came out against the exam. Bergeson won in the subsequent November general election by a margin of 56% to 44%. The sources and amounts of financial support received by each candidate are illuminating. Billings raised \$67,000 in contributions, including money from the Public School Employees PAC and the Washington Education Association. Bergeson raised \$438,000, and her list of contributors included major state employers, such as Boeing, Microsoft, Puget Sound Energy, Safeco, Alaska Airlines, and Washington Mutual Bank. An editorial writer observed, "Business leaders understand the importance of pushing each child academically. It was the business community that pushed for education reform in the early 1990s" (Voters want education excellence, 2005).

In other states, a similar pattern emerged of teacher organizations and certain parent groups opposing exit exams and business-related groups supporting the tests. In Arizona, the unsuccessful bill to end the AIMS requirement was supported by the Arizona PTA, the Arizona Educators Association, and the Arizona School Boards Association (Scutari, 2005). Business-related groups have been active in defending exit exams. California Business for Education Excellence opposed the efforts to postpone the CASHEE requirement (Tucker, 2005). In Indiana, a group of manufacturers supported the ISTEP because they felt the skills of entry-level workers have increased, perhaps as a result of the test (Berggoetz, 2004). In legislative hearings on exit exams in Louisiana, members of the Council for a Better Louisiana supported tougher exit exams, spurred by the perception among business leaders that public education in the state was getting worse (Sentell, 2005). Similar business groups have also supported exit exams in Massachusetts, Texas, and North Carolina during the past year.

In our 2004 report, we summarized previous public opinion polls that indicated the public was either supportive of exit exams or divided on the issue. During the past year, we came across one new statewide public opinion poll and one new national survey of opinions on exit exams—not enough evidence to determine whether public opinion across the nation has changed.

The new statewide poll took place in Arizona, and it suggests that the views of Arizona citizens about exit exams have become less favorable and more divided in recent years. In March 2001, when AIMS was first supposed to have been a graduation requirement, a Northern Arizona University poll asked, “Should public school students be required to pass a standardized test such as AIMS in order to graduate?” The results were positive: 65% of respondents answered yes, and 30% answered no (Northern Arizona University, 2001). But four years later, a poll by Arizona public television asked about the bill to end AIMS as a graduation requirement. In this January 2005 poll, 48% of the public favored ending the requirement, 44% did not support ending it, and 8% were undecided (KAET, 2005). While the two polls did not ask the same question and are not readily comparable, it would not be surprising if public support for the test had decreased in light of Arizona’s experience with the AIMS and extensive media coverage of test-related issues.

A national study conducted by Peter Hart Associates for Achieve, Inc., also shed light on how exit exams are perceived by a subset of Americans with a special interest in these tests. Rather than surveying the general public, the poll surveyed recent high school graduates who were now in college, college professors, and employers. The study found that all three groups believed high school students are not prepared for college or work. College instructors gave the harshest assessment: 65% of this group indicated that public high school graduates are not prepared for college, and even professors at selective colleges voiced dissatisfaction. All three groups also agreed that exit exams, tougher courses, and higher standards are needed to rectify this situation. Remarkably, 81% of students, along with 79% of professors and 89% of employers, supported exit exams as a way of “improving things” (Peter Hart Associates, 2005).

CHANGES IN EXIT EXAM POLICIES

Although media reports about exam-related controversies in a few states might suggest that exit exam policies are in turmoil, state policies governing these tests have remained fairly stable over the past 18 months, according to the Center’s survey. In a few states, such as California and Arizona, the legislature or state actively rebuffed efforts to make more dramatic changes in exit exam programs.

Of the 25 states responding to our survey, 6 reported no notable changes to their exit exam policies during the past 18 months, as shown in **Table 6**. The rest of the states reported varying types of changes, although not every state responded to our survey questions about each type of change. Furthermore, a few states adopted policy changes as our surveys were nearing completion, so key changes did not show up in their survey responses. Where we were aware of these changes, we have mentioned them in the notes to Table 6 and have discussed them below.

Many states that did report changes to exit exam policies were filling in details that had been left unaddressed during the initial push to enact these exams or were fine-tuning their testing systems based on early experiences with implementation. Still, even modest policy changes can mean the difference between passing and failing the tests for thousands of students across the nation.

State changes in exit exam policies can be grouped into several categories. They include changes in (1) timelines; (2) tested subjects or test format; (3) scoring; (4) content or test difficulty; (5) alternative routes to a diploma; (6) remediation and preparation services; and (7) use of exit exams for higher education. Table 6 shows which states have made various types of changes. Revisions in remediation policies are the most common, with 11 states reporting this type of change. The remainder of this section discusses the most noteworthy changes in all of these categories.

Table 6—Changes in Exit Exam Policies Reported by States

State	No change reported	Timelines	Subjects & format	Scoring	Content & difficulty	Alternative routes	Remediation	Higher education
Alabama	•							
Alaska	•							
Arizona				•		•	•	•
California	• *					*		
Florida						•	•	
Georgia	•							
Idaho							•	
Indiana				•	•			
Louisiana		•						
Maryland			•					•
Massachusetts			•					•
Minnesota	•				**			
Mississippi			•				•	
Nevada							•	
New Jersey		•	•				•	
New Mexico	•							
New York					•	•		
North Carolina			***		***	•		
Ohio		•	•		•	•		
South Carolina		•				•	•	
Tennessee				•	•			
Texas							•	•
Utah								
Virginia						•	•	
Washington		•		•	•		•	
Total Number	6	5	5	5	5	7	11	3

*In June 2005, as our survey was nearing completion, the California legislature enacted legislation requiring the state to report inadequacies in high schools' low performance on state exams and affecting alternative routes to a diploma.

** In May 2005, Minnesota enacted legislation to replace its Basic Skills Tests with the GRAD test geared to higher grade-level content and aligned with the state content standards.

*** In May 2005, as our survey was already underway, the North Carolina state board of education added a new graduation requirement for students to pass five of its existing end-of-course exams to earn a diploma.

Note: Not all states responded to survey questions about each type of change.

Table reads: Five states reported making policy changes in exit exam timelines. Florida reported exit exam policy changes affecting alternative routes and remediation, but no changes in the areas of timelines, subjects and format, scoring, content and difficulty, or higher education.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Changes in Timelines

While a few states reported changes in exam timelines, none reported changing its schedule for withholding diplomas or administering its exit exam for the first time. Three states—Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas—attached consequences to exit exams for the first time in 2005, but they did so according to schedules they had already established.

Some states held firm against proposals to make dramatic changes in their exit exam timelines. A notable example was California, where legislators rejected bills in 2005 that would have delayed the graduation test requirement until all districts have “adequate resources” and that called for an alternate means to a diploma other than testing. The legislature passed less drastic measures that will continue the exit exam mandate but require public disclosure of inadequacies in the state’s lowest-performing high schools and the development of plans to correct deficiencies. California lawmakers also passed a bill giving the state superintendent the authority to review and certify district proposals for alternative routes to a diploma (Sanders, 2005).

The Arizona legislature rebuffed efforts by some legislators to do away with AIMS as a graduation requirement, instead adopting a compromise bill described below to give students AIMS credit for earning passing grades in certain courses (Associated Press, 2005; Sherwood, 2005a).

Some states made relatively modest changes in their schedules for phasing in tests. New Jersey pushed back the date for adding a science test from 2005 to 2007. Ohio altered its process for phasing in its new Ohio Graduation Tests to allow students in the classes of 2005 and 2006 to use the OGTs instead of the older state ninth-grade proficiency tests to meet the graduation requirement.

A few states revised their test administration schedules, as follows:

- Louisiana added a February retest opportunity for seniors only so these students could get back their results before graduation.
- Washington decided to move up its spring administration of the WASL exam to allow results to be reported by June 10, the deadline in state law. In response to concerns about test security, Washington also reduced the number of days for the spring test administration and, beginning in 2006, will eliminate makeup testing in the spring.

Changes in Tested Subjects or Test Format

Only five states reported making revisions to the subjects or formats of their exit exams, although North Carolina took action as our survey was nearing completion. Massachusetts, to cite one example, decided to add a science test as a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2010. Maryland replaced its English I end-of-course assessment with an English II assessment, a grade 10 test based on different Core Learning Goals. New Jersey lengthened the duration of its math test by 40 minutes without significantly increasing the number of test questions—a change that could help some students do better by giving them more time for each question.

In May 2005, the North Carolina state board endorsed new rules, described in **Box 2**, which will require students to pass end-of-course exams in five subjects to graduate. Currently, North Carolina students must pass standards-based exit exams in three subjects, which are given in grades 8 and 9. This policy change raises the demands on students, in terms of both passing more subjects and taking tests geared to more challenging content than the current tests.

Box 2—North Carolina Boosts Level of its Exit Exams

North Carolina is one state heading in the direction of tougher high school exit exams. It has been developing new standards and strengthening its accountability system over the past few years and will require students in the class of 2010 to pass five end-of-course exams and complete a special project. To get a diploma, students will have to pass tests in five core courses: English I, algebra I, biology, U.S. history, and civics and economics. The senior project requires an 8-10 page research paper, an accompanying “product related to the paper” (presumably an audiovisual presentation or other type of project), and a portfolio record of progress on the senior project. The student must then present the project to a panel of teachers and community members.

The core courses to be tested are taught at the ninth and tenth grade levels. The end-of-course exams themselves are not new; rather, they have been used as course final exams that accounted for 25% of a student’s grade. With the new policy, however, they will become a state graduation requirement. The end-of-course exit exams will replace the current exit exam, which tests competency in reading, mathematics, and computer skills at the eighth and ninth grade level. North Carolina is unusual in that it is the only state to test computer skills in its exit exam

program. While other states include questions relating to economics on their social studies tests, as well as geography and other subjects, North Carolina will soon be the only state that specifically lists economics as a tested subject area.

Students will receive two opportunities to retake the tests if they do not pass, and an appeals process will allow students who still do not pass after two tries to have their classroom performance in the core courses reviewed by a panel. Principals will have the final authority for deciding whether a student has met the exit standard for a particular course. North Carolina high school students choose from four courses of study—career, college, technical, and occupational. Students in the occupational course of study are exempt from the requirement and must instead meet a separate set of requirements, already in place.

Sources: Buchanan, 2005; Silberman & Ebbs, 2005; and Silberman, 2005.

Changes in Scoring, Content, or Test Difficulty

Five states—Arizona, Indiana, Maryland, Tennessee, and Washington—reported making various changes to their scoring systems during the past 18 months. Some of these changes, although small to modest in magnitude, are likely to make exit exams easier to pass in at least some subjects, while a few of these changes could make exit exam systems more rigorous.

Revising passing scores—the score students must reach to pass an exit exam and receive a diploma—is a relatively simple way to make exit exam systems easier or harder for students. Washington lowered the passing score for its reading test and made other alterations, some up and some down, in the cut scores for the basic (below passing) and advanced (above passing) performance levels in math and reading. Last fall, the Washington Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission considered a more significant change that would have lowered the pass score for its exit exam from the proficient level of achievement to the basic level, but the commission ultimately rejected the idea (Roberts, 2004). Tennessee lowered by 1 point the cut scores for the proficient and advanced levels of performance on its English language arts test, and for the proficient level on its science test. (The proficient level is the passing level for graduation on Tennessee's Gateway Exams.) Indiana revised cut scores for its new GQE tests, changing them from 466 to 551 in English language arts and from 486 to 586 in math.

Troubled by high rates of failure on the state tests that will become a graduation requirement in 2006, Arizona aligned its 2005 AIMS exam to new content standards and adopted a new scoring scale of 500–900 to replace the old scale of 200–800. The state also set new passing scores of 674 in reading, 678 in writing, and 683 in mathematics—a change from the previous cut scores of 500 for each subject on the old scale. After these changes were made, the percentage of students passing the tests went up this year in all three subjects. After debating more dramatic proposals that would have detached the graduation requirement from its AIMS test, the Arizona legislature also approved a unique and somewhat controversial measure in spring 2005 to allow students graduating in 2006 or 2007 to increase their AIMS scores by up to 25% if they earn high school grades of A, B, or C in reading, writing, and math courses. Early estimates suggest, however, that this option is unlikely to make the difference between passing and failing the exams for very many students (Kossan, 2005h).

Maryland became the first state to adopt a “compensatory” scoring system as an additional option for its exit exams. Instead of reaching the passing score on each of the state’s four subject tests, students can meet the exit exam requirement by achieving a minimum score (which is no more than 10% lower than the passing score) on each subject test *and* reaching a state-established combined score on all four exams. This option allows students who score below the passing mark on one or more tests to compensate for their lower performance by exceeding the passing score on other tests. A proposal was made in Texas to average TAKS scores across four subtests to pass instead of requiring students to pass each one, but the measure was never approved (Stutz, 2004).

Changes in test content and grade-level standards can also affect the difficulty of a test. Like North Carolina, Minnesota took steps in May 2005 to make its exit exam more challenging. The state agreed to replace the current Basic Skills Test, administered in grades 8 and 10, with more rigorous assessments, to be given in grades 9, 10, and 11 (Boldt, 2005).

Indiana took steps that could make its math GQE more challenging by adding algebra I items and other math content through the eighth grade level; as a result of this change, about 30% of the questions on the math test now deal with algebra. Indiana also put in place new curriculum standards for the class of 2007, and these standards were tested for the first time in fall 2004.

New York moved in the other direction to make its controversial Regents Mathematics A exam easier. The state modified the content, questions, and format of the test, effective with the January 2004 administration. This exam had come under criticism in 2003 after large numbers of students failed it and an independent panel of math experts concluded the test was too hard. Recently, the test has been criticized for being too easy, however. According to a *New York Post* analysis, the state now requires students to answer only 31% of the math test questions correctly to pass, and a state math professor concluded it was possible for a student to pass simply by guessing (Andreatta, 2005).

Changes in Alternate Routes to a Diploma

Seven states, shown in Table 6, made policy changes that expanded student options for meeting graduation testing requirements. Florida, North Carolina, and New York approved new or additional opportunities for students to substitute scores on other standardized tests, such as the ACT or SAT tests, in place of passing scores on the state’s exit exam. South Carolina instituted a process for students to appeal their scores on the exit exam. An interesting set of alternative assessments is being developed in Washington, described in **Box 3**.

Box 3—Alternative Assessments to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning

The state of Washington is phasing in a new exit exam, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, which students in the class of 2008 will have to pass to earn a diploma. In response to a state law passed in March 2004, the state is developing alternative methods of assessment to address the needs of students who fulfill their high school course requirements but do not pass

the WASL. Alternative assessments would afford these students other ways to demonstrate their competence and graduate.

The Washington legislature passed a bill on alternative assessments (House Bill 2195), which states that a student must fail one or more WASL subject area test two times to be eligible to take an alternative assessment. The legislation also instructs the state department of education to develop options for the alternative assessments and says that the alternatives should be based on objective measures, assess knowledge and skills comparable to those measured by the WASL, and be comparable in rigor to the WASL.

Four Options

The Washington state department of education asked David Conley, director of the Center for Educational Policy Research (CEPR), to generate options for alternative forms of assessments through a public input process. Numerous options were considered and evaluated in consultation with hundreds of stakeholders and state and national testing experts. Four options, described below, were initially judged to meet the requirements of the law and to be the most viable.

- *Option 1 – WASL grade point average.* A core set of high school courses would be identified that reflects the content standards tested by the WASL in each subject area. Students' grades in this cluster of courses would comprise their "WASL GPAs," which could be used to give students credit that could compensate for below-passing WASL scores. For example, a high WASL GPA in qualifying high school mathematics courses could make up for a below-standard score on the WASL mathematics test.
- *Option 2 – WASL courses and exams.* Students who do not pass the WASL would take one or more courses that cover the content standards tested by the WASL. Instead of administering one large WASL test, the content standards tested by the WASL could be assessed with smaller unit or end-of-course exams (possibly administered online).
- *Option 3 – Culminating project.* A senior year culminating project, soon to become a state graduation requirement, could also be used to demonstrate that students meet the content standards tested by the WASL. The state would develop a rating sheet for each required subject area, against which the projects would be scored, and could also develop sample projects to illustrate the scoring criteria.
- *Option 4 – Juried assessment.* Students would submit a collection of their work—classroom assessments, essays, projects, and other evidence of their performance in high school courses—for review by trained panels of educators. The state would develop guidelines governing which materials should be included in the collections to demonstrate that students met the content standards tested by the WASL, along with criteria for scoring the collections.

In addition to these options, an appeals process is being researched. One possible appeals process would involve reviewing, on a case-by-case basis, the previous academic achievement of

students with special circumstances, such those who have severe health issues or who moved to Washington from another state during their junior or senior year.

Feasibility Study

After examining the four options, the House Education Committee of the Washington legislature called for a feasibility study to gather information about the pros and cons of each option, steps necessary for implementation, projected costs, and possible unintended consequences.

The CEPR research team is evaluating each option according to a set of detailed criteria, which fall into four broad categories as follows:

- *Complexity*. How difficult and time-consuming will it be to develop and implement this option statewide? How difficult is the option to administer and maintain annually?
- *Technical quality*. What would it take to make this option valid and reliable on a large scale? How well does the option cover the same material as the WASL?
- *Impact*. How many students are likely to use the option? What steps would have to be taken to ensure that the option is fair and appropriate for a diverse student population?
- *Costs*. What are the costs of piloting, implementing, and maintaining this option statewide? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this option in relation to its cost? What comprehensive set of state and local resources is necessary to implement and conduct this option?

The final report of the feasibility study is scheduled to be completed in early fall 2005 and will summarize the input received from educator groups across the state. The goal is to provide the state with enough information to begin statewide pilot testing of the most promising alternative assessment options in the 2005-06 school year. Washington's effort to research the feasibility of a variety of options will likely be useful to other states with exit exams that are considering alternative assessment policies. For more information and updates, see the project Web site at <http://cepr.uoregon.edu/@new/feasibility.study.of.alternative.assessments.asp>.

Source: Center for Educational Policy Research, 2005.

Some state policy changes addressed alternative routes for students with disabilities, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. An example is South Carolina, which introduced a new alternative assessment to enable students with serious cognitive impairments to meet its exit exam requirement.

Changes in Remediation and Preparation Services

Our survey suggests that states are paying more attention to remediation and preparation policies in their discussions about exit exams. Eleven states—the most for any category of policy

change—reported that during the past 18 months they had enacted new state-level programs or targeted funding for student remediation and test preparation related to exit exams.

The specific types of remediation and preparation services are explained in more detail in Chapter 4, but a few examples can convey the range of state policy responses. Arizona established a state fund to reimburse school districts for the cost of one-on-one tutoring for students who had not yet passed its AIMS test. Virginia channeled state funding toward several remedial and test preparation programs, including Project Graduation, which helps students pass end-of-course exams. Idaho and Nevada are among several states that have provided new support for technology-based remediation and test prep, such as online remedial tools in subjects tested by exit exams.

Higher Education and Other Changes

Policy discussions about linking exit exams to higher education came to fruition in three states during the past year. With the class of 2005, Massachusetts began awarding John and Abigail Adams college scholarships to graduating seniors who scored highly on the MCAS exams. Arizona began offering tuition waivers at three state universities to students who achieved the highest performance level on the state exit exam. And as mentioned in Chapter 2, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board established standards in 2004 for using scores on the math and English TAKS exit exams to determine whether students are ready to enroll in postsecondary education.

Chapter 4

Assistance to Help Students Pass Exit Exams

KEY FINDINGS

Preparation and Remediation

- More states are offering various supports to prepare students to meet exit exam requirements and help struggling students pass. Nineteen states report that they have developed preparation and remediation materials or programs, a significant increase over the 10 states that reported this last year.
- The number of states offering computer or online-based remediation and preparation programs grew from 6 to 10 over the past year. Several states are also providing individualized support for students, in the form of personalized study guides, online tutorials, and tutoring.
- A few states have moved beyond basic remediation or preparation programs and are rethinking curriculum as a way to prepare students to master exit exam content. Strategies include teaching more challenging course material at lower grade levels.
- The number of states providing dedicated funding for remediation related to state exit exams appears to have increased, as gauged from state survey responses. States vary widely in the types of efforts they support and how generously they fund them.

Options for General Education Students

- All states with exit exams allow students to retake the tests if they do not pass, and 20 states allow students who have completed twelfth grade to continue retaking exit exams to obtain a regular diploma. The most common additional options provided by states to help students meet graduation requirements include awarding alternate diplomas (13 states), allowing students to appeal their exit exam results or seek a waiver of the exam requirement (9 states), accepting results from other states' exit exams (6 states), and permitting students to substitute scores from other tests, such as the ACT or SAT tests, in lieu of passing the state exit exam (6 states).

Options for Students with Disabilities

- All 25 states with exit exams offer these tests in Braille or large print versions for students with disabilities. States also offer a variety of other test accommodations, including changes in test presentation, response modes, scheduling, and setting, and use of assistive devices. In 18 states, students with disabilities receive the same accommodations on exit exams as they do on all other statewide tests, but in 7 states, students with disabilities are eligible for a different—and sometimes broader—set of accommodations for exit exams. Many of these accommodations are driven by

requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal statute with which all states must comply.

- Six states allow exemptions or waivers of test requirements for students with disabilities who are struggling to pass exit exams, while 12 offer alternate assessments for students with disabilities whose skills are not appropriately measured by the regular test. State policies differ about whether these students receive a regular diploma if they take an alternate assessment instead of the regular test.
- Fourteen states with exit exams, a majority of those surveyed, provide special diplomas or certificates of attendance to students with disabilities who do not meet graduation testing requirements. These special diplomas signal different levels of accomplishment, depending on the state, but typically do not carry the same weight as a regular diploma.

Whether an exit exam is fair depends in large part on whether students have an opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills being tested. States are implementing a variety of supports to prepare students to pass exit exams and provide remediation to those who fail the tests. A fair exit exam system also includes alternative paths to a diploma for students who are making an effort but for various reasons cannot pass the tests after multiple tries.

This chapter reports our 2005 survey findings about preparation and remediation assistance and other supports that states are providing to help students pass exams. First we look at recent developments in state preparation and remediation activities. Next we describe the retesting opportunities, alternate or substitute assessments, and alternate routes to a diploma available to help general education students meet graduation requirements in exit exam states. A final section describes the test accommodations and other special options available to help students with disabilities meet exit exam requirements. Supports for English language learners are addressed in detail in Chapter 6.

PREPARATION AND REMEDIATION

Results from the Center's 2005 survey suggest that states are making greater efforts to prepare students for exit exams and provide remediation to students who are struggling to pass. But our results also show that states differ in how much responsibility they take for ensuring students receive and attend remediation services, developing state-level remedial programs and materials, and providing state funds for remediation.

State Requirements for Remediation

A basic issue is whether states require school districts to provide remediation services to students who fail a test and whether they require these students to participate in remediation. As **Table 7** shows, 17 states require school districts to provide remediation to students. But only 7 states (Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) require students to attend remedial programs. Nevada requires school districts to provide remedial services to students who have failed any portion of the exit exam more than

twice, as opposed to most states, which do not take into account whether a student fails a subsection of the test. Three states (Indiana, Louisiana, and Massachusetts) do not require students to attend remediation, but they do make students ineligible for appeals or waivers unless they attend.

Table 7—State Remediation Policies

	Requires Districts to Provide Remediation	Requires Students to Attend Remediation	Does Not Require Students to Attend Remediation, But Those Who Don't Are Ineligible for Waiver
Alabama	√		
Alaska			
Arizona			
California	√		
Florida	√	√	
Georgia			
Idaho			
Indiana	√		√
Louisiana	√		√
Maryland	√	√*	
Massachusetts			√
Minnesota	√		
Mississippi			
Nevada	√**		
New Jersey	√	√	
New Mexico			
New York	√	√	
North Carolina	√	√	
Ohio	√		
South Carolina		√	
Tennessee	√	√	
Texas	√		
Utah	√		
Virginia	√		
Washington	√***		
Total	17	7	3

*Students in Maryland are required to attend remediation before they can retest.

**All Nevada school districts are required to provide remediation services to any students who have failed any portion of the high school exam more than twice.

***Beginning in fall 2005, Washington will require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the WASL, although students will not be required to attend remediation programs.

Table reads: Alabama requires districts to provide remediation but does not require students to attend remediation, nor does the state make students ineligible for a waiver if they choose not to attend.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Numbers of States Offering Preparation and Remediation Supports

States have expanded their preparation and remediation supports for students over the past year. As **Table 8** shows, most states with exit exams reported offering one or more types of state-developed preparation and remediation materials or programs, ranging from study guides and practice tests to after-school, summer, or weekend tutorial programs. Several states offer more than one type of support. Altogether, 19 states reported this year that they provide some type of test preparation or remediation supports at the state level, an increase over the 10 states that reported providing these resources in 2004. For each type of support shown in Table 8, the number of states offering that support has increased since 2004. Growth is especially notable in computer-based and online tools: 10 states now provide these resources, compared with 6 states in 2004.

The number of states that said they do not provide any of the supports listed in Table 8 has declined from 12 in 2004 to 6 in 2005. These six states include Alabama, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, and South Carolina. But this does not mean that students in these states lack access to remedial materials or programs from other sources. Indiana, which provides tutorial programs but does not directly produce remediation materials, noted that several types of materials are funded under state remediation grant programs. North Carolina, which provides study guides and practice test items, also mentioned that remediation materials are developed at the local level. So it seems likely that remediation materials are developed locally in other states, as well.

Still, issues remain about how much responsibility states should take for providing remedial and test preparation materials and programs. In Tennessee, a state that reported providing no tutorial programs or remedial materials on our survey, a report from the Office of Education Accountability chastised state policymakers for being fixated on how to change the Gateway exit exam instead of finding ways to help students pass. The report recommended increased funding for remediation and intervention, identification of effective strategies in districts where students are passing, a pilot program to measure the quality of teachers' instruction in areas tested by Gateway, and extra help for special education and immigrant students (Riley, 2004).

Table 8—State Supports for Student Preparation and Remediation

State	Practice Tests/ Items	Computer-based Program	Study Guide	After-school Tutorial Program	Weekend Tutorial Program	Summer School	Other	None
Alabama								•
Alaska	•							
Arizona	•	•	•				•	
California	•		•					
Florida	•	•						

State	Practice Tests/ Items	Computer-based Program	Study Guide	After-school Tutorial Program	Weekend Tutorial Program	Summer School	Other	None
Georgia	•		•					
Idaho		•						
Indiana		•		•		•		
Louisiana	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Maryland							•	
Massachusetts								•
Minnesota								•
Mississippi	•	•	•				•	
Nevada	•	•	•				•	
New Jersey						•		
New Mexico								•
New York								•
North Carolina	•		•				•	
Ohio	•							
South Carolina								•
Tennessee	•						•	
Texas	•	•	•				•	
Utah	•	•						
Virginia	•	•		•	•	•	•	
Washington	•						•	
Total for 2005	15	10	8	3	2	4	10	6
Total for 2004	*	6	5	1	1	2	5	12

*The 2004 survey did not include a category for practice tests or items.

Table reads: Arizona currently provides practice tests or items, computer-based programs, and study guides to students for exit exam preparation and remediation purposes.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Materials and Online Tools

Practice tests or test items are the most commonly reported type of preparation and remediation tool, as confirmed in Table 8. Of the 15 states that offer these tools, several noted a change in how they use them. Nevada has recently restructured its exit exams to allow test forms to be publicly released beginning in September 2005. This permits students to prepare to take the test by practicing on the prior tests.

A majority of states that administer exit exams actually release questions from past tests to aid students with preparation and remediation. Although releasing exam items can be costly because it requires ongoing development of new test questions, this can be a helpful learning tool for students and a useful way to inform teachers, parents, and students about the kinds of content and skills being tested. As shown in **Figure 5**, four states reported releasing all test questions and correct answers each year. Another 12 states release some questions and responses annually or periodically. Nine states do not release any test questions or responses.

Figure 5—State Policies for Releasing Exit Exam Questions and Answers, 2005

[Map of States]

States that release all questions and responses after the test is given: MA, NY, OH, TX (4 states)

States that release some questions and responses: AZ, CA, FL, IN, LA, MD, MS, NJ, SC, UT, VA, WA (12 states)

States that do not release any questions or responses: AL, AK, GA, ID, MN, NV, NM, NC, TN (9 states)

Figure reads: Massachusetts is one of four states that release all exit exam questions and responses after the test is given.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Often these practice tests and released items are provided online. Texas, for example, is providing an interactive practice test with immediate scoring for students. But practice tests are just one type of online support being provided by states. Virginia is offering online exam tutorials that include a pretest, exercises tailored to student needs, and a post-test assessment. Nevada has begun using a new computer-based remediation aid for math that was developed by a local business in the state. Altogether, 10 states reported this year that they use some form of computer-based program for preparation or remediation.

State-developed study guides are another common tool being produced by states to help students prepare for exit exams. Eight states, listed in Table 8, reported using study guides. In Texas, for example, all students receive general study guides, and those who do not pass exit exams the first time receive personalized study guides outlining the curricular areas on which they need to focus.

Tutoring and Summer Programs

Four states (Indiana, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Virginia) have chosen to offer remediation programs outside of regular school time—either after school, during weekends, or in the summer, as shown in Table 8. All four of these states offer summer school. New Jersey, for example, offered a pilot summer program for the first time in 2005. In addition, Louisiana and Virginia offer both after-school and weekend tutorial programs, while Indiana provides after-school tutoring.

Other Remediation and Preparation Efforts

Ten states, listed in Table 8, are implementing other types of remediation and preparation programs that do not fit neatly into the categories described above. Virginia, for example, is providing funds to school districts to replicate a pilot program called Project Graduation Academies, which includes academic year programs that provide targeted support to students in English and math skills. Arizona has implemented a new program for one-on-one and small group tutoring for students who have not yet passed the AIMS.

Other states have adopted more comprehensive prevention measures, including changes in curriculum, to prepare students to pass exit exams and avoid remediation later. Maryland is experimenting with rearranging the order of high school courses to teach exam-related content and skills from a younger age. Some Maryland districts are also taking a more proactive approach to helping students at risk of failing exams. This process begins with officials examining students' seventh grade assessment results and adjusting their high school curriculum accordingly (Kay, 2005). Ohio has adopted a similar strategy of "pushing down" course content and teaching more advanced topics at lower grades. Material that was once taught in tenth grade is now being covered in ninth grade to help students prepare for the new Ohio Graduation Tests (High school exit exam gets harder, 2005). New Jersey is considering revamping its curriculum after an expensive summer remediation program failed to produce dramatic gains in math pass rates. State officials have taken this as an indication that remediation alone may be ineffective and that they may need to reorganize the state math curriculum and begin teaching algebra earlier (McCarron, 2004).

Some states are choosing to strengthen teacher training as a means of improving student performance. Florida has given teachers access to information on the latest research on reading through its Just Read, Florida! Program. In Maryland, an online algebra/data analysis course is being piloted during the 2005-06 school year for teachers' use in instruction and remediation. The state plans to expand this program to include other courses in coming years. Mississippi provides teachers with a variety of preparation materials, including teacher guides, curriculum supplements, and expectation guides. Finally, Tennessee has hired exit exam consultants to provide professional development to teachers.

State Funding for Preparation and Remediation

To support the materials and programs described above, many states have increased funding for student preparation and remediation efforts. In response to our survey question about the amount of funding allocated for this purpose, some states answered by providing the amount of funding dedicated to broad academic improvement goals, while others offered information specific to exit exam efforts. As a result, the information reported is not easily comparable across states. The responses do show a broad range, with some states contributing no state funding and others allocating tens of millions of dollars. State responses can be summarized as follows:

- Of the 25 states participating in our survey, 14 reported some level of state funding for exit exam preparation and remediation; they include Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.
- Four states (Alaska, North Carolina, Utah, and Washington) said they did not provide any funding at the state level for this purpose. But it is likely that school districts in these states support some type of remediation. North Carolina, for example, specifically noted that funding for this purpose comes from school districts.

- Seven states did not respond to the question (Alabama, Georgia, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York).

Among states reporting more general state funding, Washington noted that its legislature allocated \$25 million in 2005 for a Learning Assistance Program to help raise achievement among low-income high school students. Texas similarly allocated \$30 million in 2004-05 to low-performing high schools. In school year 2004-05, South Carolina appropriated \$120 million in statewide academic assistance across all grades, while Florida reported allocating \$670 million for students in all grades who fail any state exam. Idaho also provided funds for all grade levels, with \$5.1 million available in school year 2005-06.

Other states are funding interventions that are somewhat more targeted, although still not restricted to exit exams. For example, Massachusetts allocated \$10 million in school year 2003-04 for interventions for students in grades 7-12, and California allocated \$157 million in school year 2004-05 for interventions in these same grades. **Box 4** takes an in-depth look at remediation funding in Massachusetts. Ohio has chosen to concentrate its exam preparation dollars on students whose practice test scores indicate they may have trouble passing the OGTs. In FY 2004, \$3.7 million was provided for interventions for ninth graders, and in FY 2005, \$5.9 million was provided for interventions for ninth and tenth graders.

Box 4—Test Remediation in Massachusetts

In school year 2002-03, Massachusetts provided \$50 million for MCAS remediation programs, but in 2003-04, the state significantly reduced this funding to only \$10 million. These cuts greatly reduced the number of after-school classes and programs available to help struggling students and caused the state to restrict services to a smaller group of students. For 2004-05, Governor Mitt Romney requested an increase in remediation funding to \$30 million, but just \$14.1 million was appropriated by the legislature. For fiscal year 2006, the state budget includes \$10.4 million specifically for MCAS remediation in grades 4-12 and an additional \$5.5 million for targeted interventions in underperforming schools and districts.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on The Budget Files, 2004.

Other states have targeted funding specifically on exit exam preparation and remediation. Texas, for example, allocated \$2 million in 2004-05 for personalized study guides for students who do not pass a section of the exit-level TAKS. Arizona has also sought to provide students with individualized intervention. In early 2005, the state allocated \$10 million for its individual tutoring programs, but as of mid-2005, less than \$1 million of that amount had been spent due to low participation (see **Box 5**). Other states that provide targeted funding for exit exam remediation include Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, and Tennessee. Indiana, for instance, committed \$11 million in 2004-05 for remediation services for students in grades 10-12 who had failed its exit exam, while Louisiana targeted \$2.7 million that same year on remediation programs for students in grades 10-11 who had failed its exam.

Box 5—Tutoring Funding in Arizona

In December 2004, the Arizona Department of Education made \$10 million available to schools to offer tutoring to students in the class of 2006 who had not yet passed the AIMS test. At that point, fewer than half the class had passed the AIMS, so State Superintendent Tom Horne and Governor Janet Napolitano devised the tutoring plan to prevent thousands of students from failing to graduate in 2006. The governor and superintendent arranged to transfer money remaining from a fund that is allocated on a per-pupil basis as additional state aid to education. The state legislature unanimously approved the transfer. The money was designated for individual or small-group tutoring by teachers or state-approved private tutors. Districts can apply to receive \$270 for nine hours of one-on-one tutoring for each student who still needs to pass the exam.

About 20,000 out of 37,000 eligible students signed up, and the state expected to spend \$6 million on the tutoring services. But by May 2005, it had only spent \$680,000. Superintendent Horne blamed the low spending on diminished student incentive to participate in tutoring because of ongoing efforts in the legislature to lower benchmarks, delay implementation, or even eliminate the exam. Teachers and principals cited other barriers to greater participation, including a short deadline to enroll students, a lack of student interest or time, problems with transportation, and the stigma of remediation. Also, some educators noted that students who have the greatest difficulty with AIMS often have attendance issues and other problems that detract from their focus on academics. Furthermore, some students had signed up for other outside classes or were confident in their ability to pass a retest. One district complained about funding conditions that limited tutoring to individuals or groups of no more than five students; the district said it did not qualify because it had too many students who needed help to serve them individually or in small groups. Also, one district noted that to qualify it had to submit documentation but would receive no funding for the administrative time required to document and track attendance.

Despite these problems, Governor Napolitano asked for an additional \$5 million for the tutoring program in her annual budget; this funding was later approved in the 2006 budget. Students in the class of 2006 will have two more retest opportunities during their senior year in which to pass the exam.

Sources: Arizona Department of Education, 2005; Hoff, 2005; Kossan, 2004; Kossan, 2005a; Kossan, 2005b; Kossan, Sparks & Carr, 2005; and Yara, 2005.

Some states have concentrated state preparation and remediation funding on computer-based programs. Maryland, for example, provided \$350,000 in 2004-05 and \$220,000 in 2005-06 to develop online instruction and remediation courses. Idaho appropriated \$1 million in technology funds for remediation and increased by \$450,000 the funding for its Idaho Digital Learning Academy to offer more remedial classes.

State formulas for allocating remediation funds vary widely. Some states distribute money based on numbers of students, while others target funds based on student demographic

characteristics or performance. Moreover, some states require local districts or schools to apply for funding, while others, like Idaho, allocate funds to districts without an application.

Nevada is one state that requires high schools to apply for remediation funds based on student achievement. In addition, Nevada districts are eligible for these funds only if at least 95% of their students participate in the testing mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. In Arizona, districts must submit tutoring session attendance logs and invoices to receive reimbursement for tutoring services.

Florida, Ohio, and Tennessee allocate funds on a straight per pupil basis. Maryland provides a minimum level of funding per each student and adds extra funds for special needs students. South Carolina uses another type of weighted formula that distributes extra funding to schools with greater numbers of low-income students or students in grades 4-12 who perform below grade level on state tests. Indiana allocates funding through a three-tiered method based on student and district performance. Districts with the lowest performing students receive the highest levels of funding.

Overall, the amount of remediation support provided by states appears to have increased substantially since our 2004 survey. In the coming years, as more states attach consequences to exams and as achievement gaps persist, cash-strapped states will face mounting pressure to appropriate more funding for effective remediation materials and programs.

OPTIONS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

State exit exam systems include a variety of options to help struggling general education students pass the tests and earn a diploma. (By general education students, we mean those who do not have disabilities and are not English language learners. Options for students with disabilities are described later in this chapter, and options for ELLs are addressed in Chapter 6.) Providing students with multiple opportunities to retake exit exams and creating alternate paths to a diploma not only help students, but they also help states maintain political support for exit exams. These options can make exit exam systems seem fairer because students who are competent but cannot pass the tests have other ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Offering alternate paths to diploma also conforms with the advice of testing experts not to base high-stakes decisions like graduation on a single test.

States vary widely in the types of options offered and the criteria for using them. **Table 9** summarizes the options states are providing to help students pass exit exams or obtain a diploma in other ways. The most basic option, available in all 25 states with exit exams, is to give students who fail exit exams additional chances to retake the tests while still enrolled in school. The number of retest opportunities in high school ranges from 2 to 11. Some states permit individuals to retake the test an unlimited number of times after they complete high school. Other options include the following:

- Allowing students who have completed twelfth grade to continue to retake exit exams so they can receive a regular diploma (20 states)

- Reaching reciprocal agreements to accept the results of other states' exit exams (6 states)
- Providing alternate assessments (4 states)
- Allowing students to substitute scores from other tests for passing the exit exam (6 states)
- Waiving the exam requirement for students who can demonstrate competency in other ways or allowing students to appeal test results (9 states)
- Awarding alternate diplomas to students who do not pass the exams after multiple tries (13 states)

Table 9—Options for Students to Obtain a Diploma

State	Retesting	Retesting after 12 th Grade	Reciprocity with Other States	Alternate Assessment	Substitute Assessment	Waiver or Appeal	Alternate Diploma
Alabama	•	•			•		
Alaska	•	•	•			•	•
Arizona	•		•				
California	•	•					•
Florida	•	•			•		•
Georgia	•	•				•	•
Idaho	•		•		•	•	
Indiana	•	•				•	
Louisiana	•	•					
Maryland	•			*			
Massachusetts	•	•				•	•
Minnesota	•	•					
Mississippi	•	•	•	√**		•	•
Nevada	•	•					•
New Jersey	•	•		•			
New Mexico	•	•	•			•	•
New York	•	•			•		
North Carolina	•	•			•		•
Ohio	•	•		• **		•	
South Carolina	•	•		• **			•
Tennessee	•	•					•
Texas	•	•					
Utah	•		•			•	•
Virginia	•	•			•		•
Washington	•			*			
Total	25	20	6	4	6	9	13

* Option is under development.

** Only applies to special education students.

Table reads: General education students in Alaska can retake the exit exam multiple times, including taking the exam after they have completed grade 12 in order to obtain a diploma. Alaska also has a reciprocal program with other states to waive the exit exam requirement for students who have passed other states' exit exams. In addition, Alaska provides waivers and alternate diplomas as detailed in its state profile.

Source: Center on Education policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Most states are offering the same options in 2005 that they reported offering in 2004, but a few have added options. Arizona now allows students to substitute passing scores from other states' exit exams, and Minnesota allows students to retake tests after they have completed twelfth grade.

The options shown in Table 9 carry different weight. Alternate diplomas, which include "certificates of attainment" or completion, do not typically have the same credibility as a regular diploma and are sometimes viewed with skepticism by employers and parents. The integrity of a waiver process depends on how strict or lenient the criteria are for granting the waiver and how many students are using it.

Researchers from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota recently analyzed state policies governing alternative routes to a diploma for both general education students and students with disabilities. The authors found that "information about alternative routes was vague or missing" from state Web sites (Krentz et al., 2005). For example, the researchers could not determine something as simple as who initiates the alternative route process in 3 of the 13 states with alternative routes for all students and in 5 of the 12 states with alternative routes specifically for students with disabilities.

Krentz and her colleagues suggested that alternative routes should offer students another way to demonstrate knowledge and skills that are considered comparable to those measured when students obtain a standard diploma through the standard route. Yet their analysis concluded that "this is not true for all of the alternative routes that are currently available to students," especially routes intended only for students with disabilities. The researchers criticized states for this discrepancy, stating, "Many states seem to believe that these students need to be excused from showing the same knowledge and skills to obtain the same diploma as other students obtain."

The study offered the following recommendations about alternative routes:

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

The NCEO study emphasized that examining the consequences of the alternative route is just as important as examining the consequences of the regular graduation exam. Our own data indicate that this is definitely an area requiring further investigation. This year's survey asked states to indicate the percentage of general education students who took an alternate assessment or substitute test. We found that few states could provide these data. Although four states provide an alternate assessment, only New Jersey tracked the percentage of students who used the alternate assessment, which was 18% in 2004. In some New Jersey high schools, the rate is closer to 80%. However, the state is currently debating whether the New Jersey alternative assessment, the Special Review Assessment (SRA), should be phased out. The open-ended, untimed assessment is taken by those students who fail at least one section of the state's standard high school assessment. Critics feel that the SRA provides an easy out for students. Supporters claim that the SRA provides an important alternative for those who would have dropped out altogether. In August, the state board of education will vote on a proposal to phase out the SRA beginning with next year's freshman class.

Six states (Alabama, Florida, Idaho, New York, North Carolina, and Virginia) accept results from substitute tests, but only three states tracked students' use of the option. Evidence from Florida, New York, and Virginia indicates that the substitute test option is not being widely used: all three states reported that less than 1% of general education students substituted results from an allowable test to earn a diploma.

POLICIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Developing appropriate and fair testing policies for students with disabilities is one of the most challenging issues facing states with exit exams. This group of students is very diverse, so testing policies suitable for students with serious cognitive disabilities will probably look very different from those intended for hearing-impaired students. As a group, students with disabilities often have much lower passing rates on exit exams than students in general. In addition, states must comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires students with disabilities to participate in general state assessments with appropriate accommodations where necessary, and the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires students with disabilities and English language learners to participate in state accountability tests with accommodations as needed.

Furthermore, testing policies for students with disabilities are a topic of great concern to parents, disability advocates, and others, and have been a subject of heated debate, lawsuits, and legal analyses. In Alaska, for example, a settlement was reached in 2004 to a class action suit which had charged that the state's High School Graduation Qualifying Exam discriminated against students with disabilities. As part of the agreement, Alaska granted diplomas to students with disabilities in the class of 2004 who had not passed the exit exam but had met other graduation requirements. And, as noted below, the state also agreed to offer a detailed list of accommodations to students with disabilities (Cavanagh, 2004).

The Alaska situation illustrates some of the difficulties involved in designing policies that are inclusive and hold students with disabilities to high expectations but also recognize these students' unique needs and maintain their opportunities for productive lives after high school.

Test Accommodations

Accommodations are changes in the testing situation that make it possible for students with special needs to participate meaningfully in a test. Students with disabilities and English language learners are the two groups most often eligible for accommodations. This section focuses on accommodations for students with disabilities. Accommodations for English language learners are examined in detail in Chapter 6.

Accommodations are intended to level the testing field by making a student's disability or language status less of a factor in measuring academic performance. The allowable accommodations for a student with disabilities are outlined in the student's individualized education program under IDEA or section 504 plan under the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In designing state testing policies, states generally distinguish between standard accommodations, which do not substantially change the test's level, content, or performance criteria or compromise what is being measured, and modifications or nonstandard accommodations, which alter the knowledge and skills being measured and affect standardization. For example, reading aloud a test of reading skills is a modification, rather than a standard accommodation, because it may produce a score that is not a valid measure of how well a student can read and comprehend a written passage.

All states surveyed provide testing accommodations to students with disabilities as required by IDEA. Unlike accommodations for ELLs, those for students with disabilities are universal and relatively uniform across states. Most states noted that accommodations provided on exit exams and other tests are generally the same ones outlined in the IEP or section 504 plan, and that these accommodations are consistent with the types of assistance students receive throughout the year in the classroom.

While state approaches to meeting an individual student's needs vary slightly by state and by test, the accommodations provided can be grouped into five major categories: changes in test presentation, mode of response, test scheduling, and test setting, and use of assistive/supplemental devices. It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of all potential accommodations, but the ones most frequently reported by states are listed in **Table 10**. (All the examples listed in the table are considered standard accommodations.) In addition, states have a process by which IEP teams can request individualized accommodations outside of those traditionally provided by the state.

Table 10—Categories of Test Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Type of Accommodations	Common Examples
Presentation	Tests in Braille, large print, one item per page, signed test, audiotape, oral administration
Response	Signed, verbal, or dictated response, marking in the test booklet, use of Braille
Scheduling	Multiple brief testing sessions, extra breaks, additional time, testing at specific time of day, alternate sequence of subtests
Setting	Individual or small group testing, special lighting, alternative testing location, special furniture, special acoustics
Assistive/Supplemental Devices	Visual magnification devices, auditory amplification devices, abacus, calculator, dictionary, glossary

Table reads: Common examples of accommodations in the presentation of exit exams include tests in Braille or large print, test booklets with one item per page, signed tests, audiotaped tests, and oral administration.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

The first two categories, accommodations in test presentation and response, give students alternative ways of reading and answering test questions. All 25 states surveyed responded that they made versions of their exit exam available in Braille and large print. Other types of alternative presentation offered by states include a signed version of the test and an English language audiotape or oral administration (except for reading tests). Accommodations in response include allowing students to answer test questions with a sign language, verbal, or dictated response, permitting them to mark in the test booklet, or allowing them to use a Braille writing device.

The next two categories of accommodations, changes in test scheduling and setting, afford students with disabilities greater flexibility in when and where they take exams. Scheduling accommodations include allowing a student to take the test in several brief sessions, providing additional breaks or testing time, scheduling testing at a specific time of day, or administering subtests in an alternate sequence. Accommodations in setting may include testing students individually or in small groups, providing special lighting, giving the test in an alternative location, or making available special furniture or special acoustics as needed.

Finally, states also meet students' testing needs by providing assistive or supplemental devices that students also use for classroom instruction. These can include instruments for visual magnification, auditory amplification, or other purposes, such as a calculator, abacus, dictionary, or glossary.

All states with exit exams except Nevada provide a standard diploma to students who test with accommodations. Nevada provides an adjusted diploma to all students who use test accommodations. Alaska settled a class-action lawsuit in 2004 to allow a wider range of

accommodations on its exit exam and still permit students with disabilities to receive regular high school diplomas.

In 18 states the accommodations students with disabilities receive on the exit exam are the same for all statewide tests, as shown in **Table 11**. In 7 states (Alabama, California, Georgia, Mississippi, New York, Texas, and Washington) accommodations vary according to the nature, purpose, subject, and development of the test. For example, New York permits certain accommodations for exit exams that are not allowed for elementary- and intermediate-level exams. These include having tests read aloud and using calculators, both of which are typically considered modifications rather than standard accommodations because if used during a test of reading or calculation skills, they alter what is being measured. At the high school level, however, New York considers these standard accommodations and permits them.

Table 11—State Accommodations Policies for Students with Disabilities

State	Accommodations on Exit Exam Same as Other Statewide Tests	Accommodations on Exit Exam Differ from Other Statewide Tests
Alabama		•
Alaska	•	
Arizona	•	
California		•
Florida	•	
Georgia		•
Idaho	•	
Indiana	•	
Louisiana	•	
Maryland	•	
Massachusetts	•	
Minnesota	•	
Mississippi		•
Nevada	•	
New Jersey	•	
New Mexico	•	
New York		•
North Carolina	•	
Ohio	•	
South Carolina	•	
Tennessee	•	
Texas		•
Utah	•	
Virginia	•	
Washington		•

Table reads: In Arizona, accommodations provided to students with disabilities for the exit exam are the same as those provided on other state tests.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Variety of Special Options for Students with Disabilities

In addition to accommodations, our state survey indicates that most states with exit exams have developed special options to help students with disabilities pass exit exams or obtain a diploma if they cannot pass the tests. These options, listed in **Table 12**, include exemptions or waivers from testing, alternate assessments, and special diplomas. All but two states with exit exams (Idaho and Minnesota) offer at least one such option as a state policy. But Idaho and Minnesota are among the nine states, discussed below, in which certain issues related to the participation of disabled students in testing are determined at the local level.

Table 12—Special Exit Exam Options for Students with Disabilities

State	Exemption/ Waiver	Alternate Assessment	Local or IEP Team Option	Special Diploma or Certificate
Alabama	√			√
Alaska		√		
Arizona	√		√ Local school boards decide	
California	√			√
Florida	√			
Georgia				√
Idaho			√ IEP team outlines alternative requirements	
Indiana		√	√ Student's case conference committee decides	√
Louisiana		√		√
Maryland				√
Massachusetts		√		√
Minnesota			√ IEP team may modify cut score	
Mississippi		√		√
Nevada				√
New Jersey	√	√		
New Mexico		√	√ IEP team sets competency levels	
New York		√		√
North Carolina		(In development)	√ IEP team decision	
Ohio		√	√ IEP team decision	
South Carolina		√	√ IEP team decision	
Tennessee				√
Texas	√		√ Admission, review, and dismissal committee decision	
Utah		√		√

State	Exemption/ Waiver	Alternate Assessment	Local or IEP Team Option	Special Diploma or Certificate
Virginia				√
Washington		√		√
Total Number	6	12	9	14

Table reads: Six states offer exemptions from or waivers of exit exam requirements for students with disabilities. Alabama offers this option and also offers a special diploma or certificate for students with disabilities.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

In addition to offering waivers, exemptions, and alternate assessments, 14 of the 25 states surveyed award some type of special diploma or certificate of attendance for students with disabilities.

Generally, states start with the assumption that students with disabilities will be required to take exit exams unless they meet certain criteria or their IEP team determines otherwise. Often the IEP team plays a critical role in decisions about exit exams for students with disabilities. And in some states, the IEP team makes other key decisions related to exit exams, as explained below.

Waivers and Exemptions

As shown in Table 12, six states (Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, New Jersey, and Texas) reported having policies to waive exit exam requirements for students with disabilities or exempt these students from having to pass the exam under certain circumstances. New Jersey, for example, permits some students with disabilities to be exempted from passing the exit exam based on their IEP, but these students must first take the test at least once in each content area. Texas special education students may be exempted from the state exit exam by their local admission, review, and dismissal committee.

The criteria for receiving a waiver or exemption differ by state, but typically they call on students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in other ways, such as passing courses and showing examples of their work in a portfolio. Florida, for instance, waives its exit exam requirement for students with disabilities who have an active IEP, have maintained a 2.0 grade point average, have the necessary 24 credit hours required for graduation with a standard diploma, and have demonstrated mastery of the state's curriculum standards. If the waiver is granted, the student receives a regular high school diploma. The state emphasizes the need to provide these students with multiple opportunities to take the test and intensive remediation in the areas they have failed.

In California, students with disabilities who take one or both parts of the CAHSEE with a testing modification (as opposed to a standard accommodation) and who receive the equivalent of a passing score are not considered as having passed the exam but are eligible to request a waiver of that part of the exam. Local school boards determine whether to grant waivers, but the

state specifies the criteria students must meet before a waiver can be granted. In particular, the student must meet all of the following conditions:

1. Have an IEP or section 504 plan that requires the student to receive accommodations or modifications when taking the high school exit examination
2. Satisfactorily complete or be on the way to completing sufficient high school level coursework for the student to have attained the skills and knowledge otherwise needed to pass the exit exam
3. Have an individual score report showing that he or she received the equivalent of a passing score on the exit exam while using a modification that fundamentally alters what the exam measures, as determined by the state board of education

If the waiver is granted and the student meets all other graduation requirements, then he or she can receive a California high school diploma.

The legality of requiring students with disabilities to pass exit exams to graduate became a topic of intense scrutiny in Arizona in 2005, and the state ultimately waived the exam mandate for these students. In February 2005, the state attorney general issued an opinion declaring that the exam was not mandatory for these students and that local school boards are responsible for establishing graduation requirements. In response to the opinion from the attorney general, the Arizona state superintendent decided to allow special education students to graduate if they had passed their courses and met the requirements of their individualized education programs but had not passed the state exit exam (Fu, 2005).

Alternate Assessments

According to our survey, 12 states already have alternate assessments for students with disabilities, and North Carolina is developing one. Typically these assessments are intended for students with more serious disabilities who would have difficulty demonstrating their knowledge and skills on the regular exit exam. South Carolina's alternate assessment, for example, is available to students who are determined to have serious cognitive impairments.

In Alaska, the IEP team can decide to provide an alternate assessment program to students with disabilities who do not pass the regular exit exam as sophomores. The state offers two alternate assessments: the modified HSGQE and the non-standardized HSGQE. The IEP team must apply for and receive approval from the state department of education to use either alternative. The modified HSGQE is offered in the spring and fall and allows modifications that are not permitted with the regular HSGQE, such as using a spell check or grammar check on a word processor, having the test read aloud, referring to a dictionary or thesaurus, or using math or writing resource guides. The non-standardized HSGQE is limited to students with severe physical or emotional disabilities who have taken the HSGQE and can document that they are unable to demonstrate their proficiency on a standardized assessment. This assessment requires a student to prepare an extensive collection of work that reflects competency in each of the state standards tested on the HSGQE. The work is then graded by a jury to ensure that the student has

met those standards. Upon completing either the modified or non-standardized HSGQE, a student is eligible to receive a regular diploma.

State policies differ about the type of credential students receive if they take an alternate assessment instead of the regular exit exam. Mississippi, for example, awards a regular diploma to students who successfully complete its High Stakes Alternative Assessment. But Louisiana awards a certificate of achievement instead of a regular diploma to students who take its alternate assessment.

Local or IEP Team Options

In nine states exit exam issues for students with disabilities are addressed locally; these states are shown Table 12. In Arizona, local school boards determine the graduation requirements for students with IEPs, consistent with the ruling of the state attorney general described above. In Idaho, the IEP team can outline alternate graduation requirements for some students with disabilities. IEP teams in New Mexico determine the level of competency that students with disabilities must reach on either the regular exit exam or the state's alternate assessment. In Ohio, decisions about whether to exempt students with disabilities from exit testing are made through the IEP.

Maryland, in which the exit exam will not become a graduation requirement until 2009, has established a task force to study various options for assessing the knowledge and skills of students with disabilities. The task force includes K-12 educators, higher education representatives, advocates for students with special needs, parents, and students. It is slated to present its findings to the state board of education by September 2007.

Special Diplomas or Certificates

As mentioned above, more than half (14) of the states with exit exams give special diplomas or certificates instead of regular diplomas to some students with disabilities. These certificates are usually available to students with disabilities who do not pass exit exams or, in some states, who take alternate assessments or use nonstandard accommodations. Typically these certificates do not carry the same weight as a regular diploma, and some advocates for students with disabilities have questioned whether they are given to some students who might be able to qualify for a regular diploma with additional supports.

North Carolina awards a certificate of achievement and transcript to students with disabilities who satisfy all state and local graduation requirements except for passing the exit exam. By state board policy, these students are permitted to participate in graduation exercises. Students with disabilities who have not met the testing requirement are entitled to receive additional remedial instruction from the school district and continue to take the competency tests during regularly scheduled administrations until they are 21. The school district may opt to continue remedial instruction and retesting opportunities for these students beyond age 21.

Maryland grants a High School Certificate to students with disabilities who cannot meet the regular diploma criteria, including passing the exit exam. Students are eligible for this

certificate if they have been enrolled in an education program for four years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and meet one of the following conditions: (1) their IEP team determines, with the agreement of their parents, that the students have developed appropriate skills to enter the work world, act responsibly as citizens, and enjoy a fulfilling life; or (2) they will have turned 21 by the end of the current school year.

Utah students who have an IEP and take the Utah alternate assessment are considered to have satisfied the testing requirement for an Alternative Completion Diploma and do not need to attempt or pass the regular exit exam. In other states, such as Washington, students with disabilities do not have to take any test to receive a special diploma or certificate.

Virginia offers two unique diplomas for students with disabilities. A Modified Standard Diploma is available to students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for the state's standard or advanced diploma but who have sufficient course credits and reach the benchmark scores set by the state board of education on state numeracy and literacy assessments. Students with disabilities who do not meet the requirement for other diplomas but have completed the objectives in their IEP receive a Special Diploma.

Chapter 5

Effects of Exit Exams

KEY FINDINGS

Pass Rates

- The percentages of students who passed exit exams on the first try were relatively close to last year's in many states, although some states, including Louisiana, Maryland, Ohio, and Tennessee, made significant gains in their pass rates.
- Large racial-ethnic achievement gaps in pass rates persist, but some subgroups of students in some states showed moderate gains this year in closing the gaps. English language learners and students with disabilities also continue to lag far behind in pass rates on exit exams.
- Cumulative pass rate data are just beginning to become available as states phase in consequences for exams and improve their data tracking systems. States reported relatively high overall cumulative pass rates, but questions arise about whether and how states account for dropouts in calculating these rates. More states are developing systems of student identifiers that should yield better data in future years about student performance across time and the interactions between exit exams and graduation rates.

Graduation Rates

- States with exit exams used widely varying methods for calculating the graduation rates they reported to the Center. The majority did not appear to calculate their graduation rates using a cohort method, which tracks the percentage of entering freshmen who earn a high school diploma four years later and which is most likely to capture students who drop out. The number of states using this method could increase over the next few years, as more states implement student-level identifiers. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education has moved to standardize methods for determining graduation rates, and 45 states recently signed a compact with the National Governors Association stating they would work toward calculating graduation rates using a cohort method.
- Graduation rates in our survey ranged from a high of 96% to a low of 63%. In most states, these rates were much lower for black, Hispanic, and Native American students. Although fewer states provided data on English language learners, students from low-income families, and students with disabilities, these special populations typically have much lower graduation rates as well.
- No consensus has emerged from research on how exit exams impact graduation or dropout rates, although state data indicate exit exams may exacerbate disparities in graduation rates between white and Asian students on one hand, and black, Hispanic, and Native American students on the other.

Exit exams cannot be considered effective if they produce undue negative effects for students or if the students who pass them are not more successful in any of a range of undertakings than students who don't. Among the most important effects to be monitored are whether large numbers of students are failing exit exams, whether some groups of students are failing at disproportionate rates and are therefore being prevented from receiving a regular diploma, and whether exit exams are negatively affecting graduation rates. This chapter examines initial and cumulative pass rates on exit exams and graduation rates in states with exit exams.

EXIT EXAM PASS RATES

Due to the high stakes nature of high school exit exams, the percentages of students passing these tests merit close attention. States generally monitor two types of passing rates: initial pass rates, which tell the percentage of students who passed the exit exam on the first try, and cumulative pass rates, which show the percentage of students who passed an exam after multiple retakes. This year, more states were able to provide us with both initial and cumulative pass rates disaggregated by subgroup.

Both initial and cumulative pass rate calculations are controversial. Methods vary across states, and slight variations in formulas can lead to divergent results. Controversies about these calculations often focus on how many students are counted in the denominator—in other words, the universe of students against which the number passing the test is compared—and at what point in their schooling these students are counted. For cumulative pass rates in particular, this denominator number can vary widely, and in many states the calculations exclude students who have dropped out before the final exam administration.

Initial Pass Rates

Most states reported initial passing rates on our 2005 survey that were similar to those provided last year, although several states reported gains in both overall initial pass rates and pass rates for students from racial-ethnic minority groups, low-income students, and students with special needs. This year, we received disaggregated initial pass rate data from 24 states, an increase from the 18 states that provided subgroup data last year. Most states submitted data from 2004, the first year that exit exams had consequences in Alaska and Virginia. **Table 13** provides initial pass rate data from states in which they were available.

Table 13—Percentages of Students Passing State Exit Exams on the First Attempt

Tests	English			Math	Science	Social Studies
	Reading	ELA	Writing			
Alabama High School Graduation Exam, 3 rd edition (2004)	82%	81%		78%	87%	74%
Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (2004)	70%		86%	67%		
Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (2004)	59%		62%	39%		
California High School Exit Exam (2004)		75%		74%		

	English					
Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (2004)	54%			76%		
Georgia High School Graduation Tests (2005)		95%	89%*	92%	67%	83%
Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (2004)	90%	93%		86%		
Indiana Graduation Qualifying Exam (2004)		68%		64%		
Louisiana Graduation Exit Examination for the 21 st Century (2004)		82%		77%	81%	84%
Maryland High School Assessment (2004)		53%		59%	61%	66%
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (2004)		89%**		85%		
Minnesota Basic Skills Test (2005)	85%		91%	74%		
Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (2004)	83%		85/89%***	91%	89%	96%
Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (2004)	70%		83%****	48%		
New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (2004)		82%		70%		
New Mexico High School Competency Examination (2005)	86%	76%	97%	78%	75%	72%
Ohio Graduation Tests (2005)	91%		82%	80%	71%	78%
South Carolina High School Assessment Program (2004)	85%			80%		
Tennessee Gateway Examinations (2004)		92%		86%	97%	
Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (2004)		87%		85%	85%	97%
Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (2005)	89%		78%	72%		
Virginia Standards of Learning End of Course Exams (2004)		89%	89%	84%	81%	83%
Washington Assessment of Student Learning (2004)		65%	65%	44%	32%	

*Results for writing are from the fall 2004 administration.

** In Massachusetts, scores for reading language arts and writing composition are combined.

*** Eighty-five percent is the initial pass rate for the writing narrative prompt; 89% is the initial pass rate for the writing informative prompt.

**** Eighty-three percent is the initial pass rate for writing in 2003.

Table reads: The first time they took the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam administered in 2004, 70% of students passed the reading section, 86% passed the writing section, and 67% passed the math section.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Most states had stable initial pass rates, with increases or decreases of a few percentage points. Some states, however, had more substantial increases between 2003 and 2004. Six showed gains in pass rates for all subjects tested, as follows:

- Louisiana reported gains of 11 percentage points in English language arts, 9 points in math, 4 points in science, and 5 points in social studies.
- Maryland also had gains across all subjects, including a 13 percentage point increase in English language arts, a 6-point gain in math, a 7-point gain in science, and a 6-point gain in social studies.
- Ohio experienced gains of 12 percentage points in both reading and math.
- Tennessee reported a 5-point gain in ELA, an 11-point gain in math, and a 2-point gain in science.

- In Utah, passing rates for reading and writing each increased by six percentage points, and math rates went up by five percentage points.
- In Washington, English language arts and math rates went up by five percentage points, writing rose by four percentage points, and science remained stable.

A few other states reported significant gains or declines in pass rates in particular subjects. Scores in Nevada fluctuated: although math scores rose by five percentage points, reading scores decreased by seven points and writing scores fell by four points. Massachusetts experienced significant changes in math pass rates only, with an increase of five percentage points. Alabama's initial pass rate in reading fell by six percentage points.

Initial pass rates vary across states and are not directly comparable because states have different content standards and tests. Still, some common trends are apparent. Most initial rates ranged from 70% to 90%. Some states that have not yet started to withhold diplomas, most notably Arizona, Maryland, and Washington, had far lower pass rates. In Maryland, for example, the initial pass rate on the English language arts test was just 53%, while in most states the rate exceeded 75%. Similarly, only 44% of students in Washington State passed the math test. And in Arizona, just 39% of students passed the math exam on their first attempt, while most other states had initial math pass rates of over 70%.

In states where consequences are in place, initial pass rates in English language arts or reading ranged from 54% in Florida to 95% in Georgia. Initial pass rates in math varied from a low of 48% in Nevada to a high of 92% in Georgia. On writing exams, pass rates were generally high and ranged from 82% in Ohio to 97% in New Mexico. Fewer states administered science or social studies tests than ELA and math exams. Among states testing science, initial pass rates ranged from 67% in Georgia to 97% in Tennessee. The span of pass rates on social studies exams went from 72% in New Mexico to 97% in Texas.

Interpreting these data is challenging because of the different standards and exams in each state. It is impossible to determine if a student passing an exit exam in one state would pass the exit exam in another state. It is also difficult to compare across years because standards change or other modifications are made that can affect challenge level and pass rates within individual states. Also, in states that have not yet withheld diplomas, students may have less incentive to perform well. Anecdotal evidence from states like Arizona suggests that students are less motivated because they believe the legislature will continue to postpone consequences, lower standards, or eliminate the exit exam entirely (Kossan, Sparks & Carr, 2005). In addition, pass rates can vary due to differences in exam difficulty, in students' familiarity with the exam, and in alignment of the exam with standards and instruction.

A central issue is whether some subgroups of students have disproportionately low pass rates. Our data for 2005 continue to show achievement gaps in pass rates for minority students, low-income students, and students with special needs. In general, these subgroups showed either flat rates or small gains in pass rates, although several states reported significant gains for several subgroups. **Table 14** shows disaggregated initial pass rates.

Many states with notable increases for subgroups are the same as those with increases in overall initial pass rates. States that showed considerable gains among minority students included Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada (math only), New Jersey (math only), Ohio, Tennessee (math only), and Washington (ELA only). States with significant gains among low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities included Georgia (math only), Minnesota, Nevada (reading only), New Jersey, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Alabama exhibited noticeable declines in pass rates for several subgroups in reading, which mirrored the state's overall decrease in reading pass rates. New Mexico had a similar decline in social studies for multiple subgroups. Other states' results were more varied. On the whole, these results offer reason for cautious optimism, although large achievement gaps remain. However, until states truly understand the causal factors that lead to such successes, it will be difficult to sustain them over time.

**Table 14—Percentages of Students Passing Exit Exams on the First Try
For All Students and by Subgroups**

	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	ELLs	Free or reduced-price lunch	Students with disabilities
AL Math 2004	78%	76%	80%	85%	65%	70%	92%	83%	59%	66%	27%
AL Reading	82%	83%	81%	91%	67%	67%	84%	89%	41%	69%	40%
AK Math 2004	67%	69%	64%	76%	45%	54%	67%	58%	38%	47%	23%
AK RLA	70%	67%	74%	82%	59%	61%	63%	69%	29%	47%	22%
AZ Math 2004	39%	40%	38%	53%	23%	20%	64%	17%	10%	21%	6%
AZ Read	59%	56%	61%	76%	49%	37%	72%	31%	12%	37%	17%
CA Math 2004	74%	73%	74%	87%	54%	61%	91%	69%	49%	61%*	30%
CA RLA	75%	70%	79%	88%	63%	62%	85%	73%	39%	60%*	30%
FL Math 2004	76%	78%	75%	86%	55%	70%	90%	81%	48%	64%	39%
FL RLA	54%	52%	56%	66%	32%	43%	66%	59%	13%	38%	18%
GA Math 2005	92%	92%	92%	96%	85%	87%	98%	90%	78%	NA	58%
GA RLA	95%	93%	96%	97%	92%	86%	95%	93%	64%	NA	70%
ID Math 2004	86%	86%	85%	88%	76%	66%	90%	74%	62%	77%	45%
ID Read	90%	89%	91%	93%	80%	67%	86%	87%	57%	81%	50%
IN Math 2004-05	64%	66%	63%	70%	31%	44%	83%	53%	40%	43%	23%
IN RLA	68%	63%	73%	74%	40%	43%	74%	55%	31%	48%	21%
LA Math 2004	77%	77%	76%	88%	62%	75%	90%	81%	67%	69%	27%
LA RLA	82%	77%	86%	91%	70%	77%	85%	87%	56%	75%	27%
MD Math 2004	59%	57%	60%	73%	35%	50%	81%	51%	36%	38%	19%
MD RLA	53%	45%	61%	65%	35%	40%	71%	49%	15%	30%	12%
MA Math 2003-04	85%	84%	86%	90%	68%	63%	91%	79%	61%	68%	59%
MA RLA**	89%	88%	92%	93%	78%	69%	90%	86%	48%	75%	65%
MN Math 2004-05	74%	76%	73%	81%	35%	46%	64%	47%	40%	52%	33%
MN RLA	85%	84%	86%	90%	56%	64%	76%	67%	55%	69%	49%
MS Math 2003-04	91%	90%	91%	96%	85%	96%	96%***	96%***	89%	86%	73%
MS RLA	83%	80%	85%	92%	74%	83%	85%	86%	54%	75%	44%
NV Math	48%	49%	47%	60%	27%	29%	59%	36%	17%	31%	8%

	All	Male	Fem ale	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	ELLs	Free or reduced- price lunch	Students with disabilities
2003-04											
NV Read	70%	66%	74%	80%	53%	54%	75%	66%	29%	55%	25%
NJ Math 2004	70%	71%	69%	81%	39%	49%	87%	72%	29%	43%	27%
NJ RLA	82%	78%	86%	90%	65%	66%	88%	79%	24%	61%	41%
NM Math 2004-05	78%	79%	78%	90%	67%	74%	92%	67%	66%	72%	42%
NM Read	86%	84%	88%	94%	82%	83%	93%	77%	76%	81%	55%
NC Reading & Math 2003-04****	78%	NA	NA	87%	65%	53%	79%	69%	68%	NA	54%
OH Math 2005	80%	80%	80%	85%	53%	64%	90%	63%	48%	NA	31%
OH Read	91%	88%	93%	93%	78%	80%	93%	84%	62%	NA	53%
SC Math 2004	80%	78%	82%	89%	67%	74%	93%	79%	67%	68%	35%
SC RLA	85%	81%	89%	92%	75%	71%	90%	84%	49%	75%	42%
TN Math 2004	86%	85%	87%	94%	66%	76%	93%	94%	59%	73%	52%
TN RLA	92%	90%	94%	94%	85%	86%	94%	87%	59%	84%	58%
TX Math 2004	85%	85%	84%	91%	73%	78%	95%	88%	59%	79%	55%
TX ELA	87%	83%	91%	92%	82%	81%	91%	89%	42%	82%	56%
UT Math 2005	72%	72%	72%	76%	40%	42%	80%	39%	42%	55%	21%
UT RLA	89%	88%	91%	93%	71%	67%	87%	69%	65%	79%	53%
VA Math 2003-04	84%	83%	84%	88%	71%	76%	92%	82%	78%	75%	59%
VA Eng.	89%	88%	91%	93%	80%	83%	92%	87%	75%	80%	68%
WA Math 2003-04	44%	44%	44%	49%	16%	20%	52%	23%	10%	25%	6%
WA RLA	65%	60%	71%	70%	43%	41%	71%	46%	17%	46%	15%

Note: RLA refers to a combined reading and language arts test.

Note: NA (not available) means that data were not provided in response to CEP's survey. New York is omitted from the table because it did not provide any data.

*California considers a student to be economically disadvantaged if (1) the student is eligible for free or reduced-price lunches under the National School Lunch Program or (2) the education level of the student's most educated parent/guardian is less than high school.

**In Massachusetts, scores for reading language arts and writing composition are combined.

***These categories reflect percentages between 96.0% and 100%.

****North Carolina reported only combined passing scores for reading and math exams.

Table reads: On the Alabama math exit exam administered in 2004, 78% of all students received a passing score on their first attempt. On the same exam, initial passing rates among subgroups were 76% for males, 80% for females, 85% for white students, 65% for black students, 70% for Hispanic students, 92% for Asian students, 83% for Native American students, 59% for English language learners, 66% for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and 27% for students with disabilities.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

The gaps in pass rates between white and black students continue to be very large, averaging 20 to 30 percentage points in most states. The smallest gaps between these groups can be found in Georgia and the largest in Minnesota. In reading/ELA, the disparities between black and white students range from a 5 percentage point gap in Georgia to a 34-point gap in both

Florida and Minnesota. Gaps in math pass rates vary from an 11 percentage point gap in Mississippi and Georgia to a 46-point gap in Minnesota. The gaps between white and Hispanic students are similar, though somewhat smaller on average. For Hispanic students, gaps in reading/ELA range from 8 percentage points in Tennessee to 39 points in Arizona. The disparities in math pass rates for Hispanic students vary from a low of 9 points in Georgia to a high of 35 points in Minnesota.

The gaps between white and Asian students are smaller overall, with Asian students now outperforming their white peers in numerous states, especially in math. A few states, however, including Alaska and Minnesota, show a sizable performance gap, with Asian students passing at lower rates than white students. The disparities between white and Native American students are variable; gaps are generally smaller than those between white and black or white and Hispanic students, but larger than those between white and Asian students. A few states, including Arizona, Minnesota, Utah, and Washington, have particularly large gaps for Native Americans.

Low initial pass rates are also evident for English language learners, students from low-income families (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunches), and students with disabilities. In every exit exam state, students with disabilities had significantly lower pass rates than other groups, ranging from a rate of only 6% in math in Arizona and Washington to 73% in math in Mississippi. ELL students often have lower passing rates as well, with a range from 10% in math in Washington to 89% in math in Mississippi. Low-income students have slightly higher passing rates, ranging from 25% in math in Washington to 86% in math in Mississippi.

Although students can retake exit exams in every state with these tests, initial pass rates matter greatly because states must target extensive resources so schools can assist students who fail on the first try. In addition, achievement gaps among subgroups continue to be alarming despite positive trends in many states. With so many students requiring remediation, states face a major challenge in ensuring that students are prepared for subsequent administrations and can graduate on time.

Cumulative Pass Rates

Although initial pass rates often receive extensive media and political attention, what ultimately matters most are cumulative pass rates—the percentage of students who successfully pass the exam after multiple retakes. Because many exit exams are still being phased in, these data have only recently begun to be available.

This year, we received disaggregated data on cumulative pass rates from four states and overall data on cumulative pass rates from an additional three states. Numerous states noted that they would begin collecting these data in the future as graduation consequences take effect and data collection procedures advance. States vary substantially in how they calculate these cumulative pass rates, including how they count dropouts and students who receive GEDs, how they determine a baseline number of students, and whether students who pass alternate exams are included. The differences in test characteristics and in methods for calculating pass rates make direct comparisons across states uninformative.

Overall cumulative pass rates range from 73% in New Jersey to 95% in Massachusetts, as shown in **Table 15**. New Jersey did not include students who passed its alternate assessment—a significant percentage of students in the state. While most states provided information about the total number of students who passed all sections of an exit exam, both Minnesota and New York provided cumulative pass rate data for individual subtests only; this information is reported in the profiles for these states. Using the data to determine how many students are denied diplomas is difficult, because some students fail to graduate only because they failed the exam, while others have not met other graduation requirements in addition to failing the exam. Furthermore, many states have come under fire for not including high school dropouts in their calculation of cumulative pass rates.

Table 15—Overall Cumulative Pass Rates

State	Overall Cumulative Pass Rate
Alabama (2003)	93%
Louisiana (2004)	94%
Massachusetts (2004)	96%
New Jersey (2004)*	73%
Nevada (2003)	89%
North Carolina (2004)	94%
Texas (2004)**	89%

*Does not include students who passed alternate assessments.

**Students in this cohort in Texas had an additional retesting opportunity in April 2005 that is not reflected in the data above.

Note: Cumulative pass rate data were not available from other states.

Table reads: In Louisiana, a total of 94% of students in the class of 2004 passed the exit exam after multiple retake opportunities.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Among states that provided disaggregated information, cumulative pass rates showed smaller achievement gaps than initial pass rates, as illustrated in **Table 16**. Why these gaps shrink is a controversial matter. Some critics have suggested that students who do not pass the test drop out of school, while other analysts have proposed that these same data present evidence of the benefit of remediation programs. Regardless of these narrowing gaps, students in some subgroups still have cumulative pass rates well below state averages. In several states, students with disabilities had the lowest cumulative pass rates. In both North Carolina and Texas, less than 60% of disabled students passed after multiple attempts.

Table 16—Disaggregated Cumulative Pass Rates

	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	ELLs	Free or reduced-price lunch	Students with disabilities
Alabama (2003)	93%	NA	NA	96%	86%	84%	94%	93%	98%	86%	66%
Massachusetts (2004)	96%	95%	96%	98%	88%	85%	95%	94%	78%	89%	84%
North Carolina (2004)	94%	NA	NA	95%	89%	88%	93%	93%	53%	NA	55%
Texas* (2005)	89%	NA	NA	95%	82%	83%	NA	NA	54%	82%	58%

*Students in this cohort in Texas had an additional retesting opportunity in April 2005 that is not reflected in the data above.

Note: NA (not available) means that the data were not provided in response to CEP's survey.

Note: Disaggregated cumulative pass rate data were not provided by other states.

Table reads: In Texas, 89% of students in the class of 2004 passed the exit exam after multiple retake opportunities. Among subgroups, cumulative pass rates were 95% for white students, 82% for black students, 83% for Hispanic students, 54% for English language learners, 82% for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and 58% for students with disabilities. Cumulative passing rates for males, females, Asian students, and Native American students were not available.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Raising cumulative pass rates is a high priority for states because an increase of a few percentage points can mean that thousands more students are eligible to graduate. Evidence from Alabama and Massachusetts suggests that cumulative passing rates rise slowly over time, but the data are still inadequate to identify broad patterns. With a growing number of states now using individual student identifiers to track achievement, trends in cumulative pass rates may come into focus in the coming years.

Course Content and Pass Rates

The ongoing evaluation of California's exit exam being conducted by the research group HumRRO reached interesting findings about the relationship between content coverage in high school courses and student pass rates on exit exams (Wise et al., 2004). The researchers surveyed students about how well their courses prepared them to take the CAHSEE. About 90% of students reported that most or all of the topics on the test were covered in courses they had taken. In English/language arts, 8.9% of students reported that many topics on the test were not covered in their courses. In mathematics, 11.4% reported that many topics were not covered in their courses. Students' perceptions of whether topics were covered in their courses were related to their passing rates. Of the students who reported that many topics were not covered in their mathematics courses, only 50% passed the mathematics test. In comparison, students who reported that most topics were covered passed the mathematics test at a rate of 69%, and those who said all topics were covered passed at a rate of 89%. While students' self-reports provide

only a rough indicator of their opportunity to learn the material tested, the high percentage of students indicating that most topics were covered in their courses is a positive sign that course instruction is aligned with the tested content standards.

Student-level Identifiers

One reason states give for not having more accurate data on cumulative pass rates and graduation rates is the lack of a system to track the achievement and educational status of individual students. Several states with exit exams are rectifying this situation by developing or implementing systems of student-level identifiers. According to our survey, 12 states have systems of student identifiers in place, and 9 more states are developing these systems. **Table 17** shows which states have or are developing these systems.

Table 17—States with Student Identifiers

State	Yes	No	Under Development
Alabama			•
Alaska	•		
Arizona	•		
California			•
Florida	•		
Georgia			•
Idaho		•	
Indiana	•		
Louisiana	•		
Maryland		•	
Massachusetts	•		
Minnesota		• *	
Mississippi	•		
Nevada	•		
New Jersey			•
New Mexico	•		
New York			•
North Carolina		•	
Ohio			•
South Carolina		•	
Tennessee**	•		•
Texas	•		
Utah			•
Virginia			•
Washington	•		
Total	12	5	9

*While Minnesota does not track the results of its exit exam using student identifiers, it does track other state tests in this way.

**Tennessee has developed a student identifier system for tracking achievement and is currently developing a similar system to track enrollment information.

Table reads: Alabama is currently developing a system of individual student identifiers to track achievement.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Massachusetts, for example, has a system of student-level identifiers known as the Student Information Management System (SIMS) database, which includes 48 variables. Each student is assigned a student identification number, which allows the state department of education to track achievement results and other student data. New Mexico and Nevada implemented their student identifier systems during school year 2004-05. New York plans to implement its system in school year 2005-06. Only five states do not have a tracking system in place, although Minnesota noted that while exit exam results are not covered by its achievement tracking system, other statewide assessments are. Finally, Tennessee currently has a system for tracking achievement and is developing an additional tracking system to monitor student enrollment over time.

GRADUATION RATES

In this year's survey, we asked states with high school exit exams to submit graduation rates disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, and other characteristics. We hoped to compare these rates with exit exam pass rates to see whether any patterns emerged concerning the impact of exit exams, but the data are simply not reliable enough to do this. Despite the fact that states are now required by the No Child Left Behind Act to collect and report graduation rates to the U.S. Department of Education, we found that these rates are difficult to obtain and are calculated in such different ways that comparisons across states are problematic.

State-reported Graduation Data

As **Table 18** illustrates, only 19 states provided us with disaggregated graduation rate data. Another four states (Idaho, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and New Jersey) provided an overall graduation rate, and two states (Alabama and California) provided no statewide graduation rate information. This uneven reporting across states is not unusual. In January 2005, states were required by NCLB to submit graduation rate data for the year 2003-04 to the U.S. Department of Education. In a special analysis of the data, the Education Trust (Hall, 2005) found that three states (Alabama, Louisiana, and Massachusetts) reported no graduation rate data at all. Another seven (Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Vermont) did not report data broken down by students' race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Table 18—Disaggregated Graduation Rates

State	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	ELL	Free and reduced-price lunch	Students with disabilities
AK 2004	63%	60%	66%	71%	56%	52%	59%	33%	NA	NA	46%
AZ	74%	70%	78%	82%	66%	63%	89%	59%	NA	NA	NA

State	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	ELL	Free and reduced-price lunch	Students with disabilities
2003											
FL 2004	72%	68%	75%	80%	57%	64%	82%	73%	47%	53%	64%
GA 2004	65%	62%	69%	72%	57%	50%	77%	63%	41%	56%	29%
IN 2004	90%	88%	91%	91%	86%	85%	96%	83%	NA	NA	NA
LA 2004	88%	85%	91%	92%	83%	89%	95%	89%	79%	80%	40%
MD 2004	84%	81%	87%	88%	77%	83%	94%	77%	86%	80%	78%
MN 2003	88%	NA	NA	92%	60%	51%	84%	58%	65%	76%	80%
NV 2003	75%	73%	76%	81%	60%	63%	81%	69%	NA	NA	NA
NM 2004	89%	NA	NA	91%	93%	89%	91%	81%	73%	NA	78%
NY 2003	76%	72%	80%	86%	58%	53%	79%	69%	NA	NA	NA
NC 2004	96%	94%	97%	97%	92%	91%	96%	94%	88%	93%	89%
OH 2004	84%	NA	NA	89%	63%	72%	92%	67%	74%	81%	79%
SC 2004	77%	72%	82%	83%	70%	69%	85%	79%	49%	66%	36%
TN 2004	76%	NA	NA	80%	62%	68%	82%	73%	NA	NA	NA
TX 2004	84%	81%	88%	90%	81%	77%	92%	85%	NA	NA	NA
UT 2004	85%	NA	NA	88%	68%	63%	88%	71%	NA	NA	NA
VA 2003	82%	79%	85%	85%	75%	72%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
WA 2003	66%	62%	70%	70%	48%	50%	71%	42%	50%	59%	50%

Note: NA (not available) means that the data were not provided in response to CEP's survey.

Note: Disaggregated graduation rate data were not available from other states.

Table reads: The graduation rate for all students in Alaska in 2004 was 63%. Among subgroups, the graduation rates were 60% for males, 66% for females, 71% for white students, 56% for black students, 52% for Hispanic students, 59% for Asian students, 33% for Native American students, and 46% for students with disabilities. Rates were not available for English language learners or students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Methods for Calculating Graduation Rates

Our survey also asked states how they calculated graduation rates and found states were using a range of methods. Recent reports have criticized states for their calculation methods and questioned whether graduation rates are artificially inflated due to these methods. The Education Trust report (Hall, 2005) examined graduation rates data submitted for NCLB, and then compared these rates with results from a formula created by the Urban Institute. This study found that many states “significantly overstat[e] the percentage of high school students who actually graduate.”

No universal standard exists for calculating high school graduation rates, although most researchers agree that the gold standard should be a “cohort” method. This method tracks the progress of a defined group of students, such as all students who were enrolled in ninth grade in 1999, from the point at which they enter high school to the point when they receive a high school diploma four years later. This method captures students who drop out at any point during the interim. Calculating cohort graduation rates requires a fairly sophisticated data system. As noted above, only 12 of our 25 survey states reported having an integrated system with student-level identifiers that allow them to track individual students. These types of integrated systems will enable states to tell if a student who stopped attending one high school transferred to another high school or is a true dropout. Three states (Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia) reported that they could not calculate a cohort rate because they do not have such a system. As Georgia explained, “The actual graduation rate calculation is a proxy calculation; in other words, the lack of unique statewide student identifiers does not allow for tracking of individual students across the four high school years.” Louisiana and New Mexico noted that they planned to start calculating cohort graduation rates with their student-level systems.

States must use graduation rates as a factor in determining whether high schools have made adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB guidelines have offered states flexibility, noting that states can calculate graduation rates by one of the following methods:

- 1) the percentage of students, measured from the beginning of high school, who graduate from public high school with a regular diploma (not including a GED or any other diploma not fully aligned with the State’s academic standards) in the standard number of years; or, 2) another more accurate definition developed by the State and approved by the Secretary in the State plan that more accurately measures the rate of students who graduate from high school with a regular diploma; and 3) avoids counting a dropout as a transfer (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b).

The Education Trust criticized the U. S. Department of Education for not providing leadership in this area, saying it allowed some states to use “questionable graduation-rate definitions.” New Mexico, for example, reported (both for our survey and the data supplied for NCLB) the percentage of high school seniors who graduated at the end of that year rather than the percentage of high school freshmen who graduated four years later. As the Education Trust noted, this calculation completely excludes students who drop out in grades 9, 10, and 11 and allows the state to report a graduation rate of almost 90%, “one of the highest reported rates in the nation.” Our survey found that Louisiana calculates its graduation rate in the same way. Both states said they hope to shift to a cohort method once a process is established.

Perhaps some of the inconsistencies in how graduation rates are calculated will abate in light of two announcements made in July 2005, one from the U.S. Department of Education and another from the National Governors Association. First, the Department announced it will begin calculating an “averaged freshman graduation rate” for all states, using data submitted through the Common Core of Data (CCD), an existing NCES data collection. This rate divides the

number of high school graduates receiving a regular diploma in a given year by the average of the number of students enrolled in eighth grade five years earlier, ninth grade four years earlier, and tenth grade three years earlier (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a). Hoping that states will improve their own data collection systems, the Department will use the averaged freshman graduation rate as an interim way to estimate graduation rates.

Second, the National Governors Association announced that 45 states have agreed to work toward calculating a graduation rate based on following a four-year cohort, as explained in **Box 6** (Balz, 2005; National Governors Association, 2005). This agreement, which acknowledges that “the quality of state high school graduation and dropout data is such that most states cannot fully account for their students as they progress through high school,” calls on states in the compact to do the following:

[T]o calculate the graduation rate by dividing the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier. Graduates are those receiving a high school diploma. The denominator can be adjusted for transfers in and out of the system and data systems will ideally track individual students with a longitudinal student unit record data system. Special education students and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency can be assigned to different cohorts to allow them more time to graduate” (National Governors Association, 2005).

The adoption of this method by 45 states will go a long way toward creating a uniform standard for graduation rates, allowing parents, students, educators, and policymakers to compare state graduation rates. Five states did not sign the compact: California, Florida, Maryland, Texas, and Wyoming.

Box 6—Governors Pledge to Improve America’s High Schools

A recent “national education summit” held by the National Governors Association and Achieve, Inc., produced strongly critical assessments of the quality of U.S. high schools. Keynote speaker Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft, called U.S. high schools “obsolete,” and the action agenda produced by the conference begins, “America’s high schools are failing to prepare too many of our students for work and higher education” (Achieve, Inc. & National Governors Association, 2005). Governors from 45 states joined educators and business leaders for the two-day event.

The action agenda resulting from the meeting supports strong accountability measures, higher standards, and tougher coursework, but stops short of specifically recommending high school exit exams as a requirement for graduation. However, many of the states singled out for praise in the document for moving in the direction of greater accountability and rigor—including Texas, California, Indiana, and Florida—are states with exit exams. Just prior to the conference, Achieve, Inc., President Michael Cohen stated to the press that there is not “unanimity” on what constitutes an optimal high school testing program (Olson, 2005).

According to the action agenda, the main problem with exit exams (lumped into the general category of “high school tests”) is that they are aligned to standards that are too low to be considered adequate for college or the workplace. “High school tests typically measure eighth, ninth, and tenth grade skills—only a subset of the skills that students will ultimately need. The result is that colleges and employers pay little attention to state test results, inadvertently sending a signal to students and parents that students’ performance on those test do not matter in the real world.”

The agenda calls on states to develop plans to accomplish the following:

1. Revise academic standards, toughen curricula and coursework, and develop assessments that “align with the expectations of college and the workplace.”
2. “Redesign” high schools in ways that make them more flexible, smaller, and more attuned to the needs of low-performing students.
3. Boost the knowledge and skill level of teachers and principals, directing the most talented to schools most in need.
4. Develop stronger accountability systems for both high schools and colleges and place an increased emphasis on graduation rates.
5. Improve students’ transition from high school to college by increasing cooperation between K-12 and postsecondary systems and streamlining their governance.

Sources: Olson, 2005; and Achieve, Inc. & National Governors Association, 2005.

Disaggregated Graduation Rates

What trends are evident from the graduation rates states reported as part of our survey? The overall graduation rates reported by states with exit exams range from 63% in Alaska to 96% in Massachusetts and North Carolina. These rates are similar to those reported to the U.S. Department of Education, as cited in the Education Trust’s 2005 study.

The 14 states that provided graduation data for both genders have higher graduation rates for girls than boys, with an average difference of six percentage points. The highest gender gap can be found in South Carolina, where 82% of girls graduate compared with 72% of boys. Indiana, Nevada, and North Carolina have the smallest gaps between male and female graduation rates, a gap of about 3%.

Survey data also show that most states report large gaps in graduation rates between white students on one hand, and black, Hispanic, and Native American students on the other (see Table 18). A few states have relatively similar graduation rates for black and white students or for Hispanic and white students. In Indiana, for example, 91% of white students graduated in 2004, compared with 86% of black students and 85% of Hispanic students. In North Carolina, 97% of white students graduated in 2004, compared with 92% of black students and 91% of

Hispanic students. And in New Mexico, 93% of black students graduated in 2004, compared with 91% of white students and 89% of Hispanic students. In most states, however, the graduation rate gaps between white students and black, Hispanic, and Native American students are at least 10 percentage points or more. Since this is the first year we collected these data, it will be interesting to analyze these rates to see whether these gaps narrow or widen as exit exams mature. To address these disparities, the Southern Regional Education Board (2005) recommended that states add goals for minority populations to the adequate yearly progress goals for NCLB.

Graduation rate data are limited for English language learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities, our survey found. Only 10 states provided graduation rates for ELLs; 9 states supplied this data for students from low-income families (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunches); and 11 states provided graduation rates for students with disabilities. Of these three special populations, disparities in graduation rates are smallest for students from low-income families, with an average gap of 8 percentage points between overall graduation rates and rates for this group. The disparities for ELLs and students with disabilities are much higher—a gap of 16 and 17 percentage points respectively when compared with overall graduation rates—yet as Table 18 shows, rates for these groups vary widely among states.

Exit Exams and Graduation Rates

Education researchers and policymakers continue to struggle with the question of whether exit exams cause graduation rates to decline. Last year's report summarized recent research in this area, finding no consensus among researchers or policymakers about the effect of exit exams on graduation or dropout rates.

New scholarship in this area is sparse, though a recent study by researchers at Ball State University found that states with exit exams had lower graduation rates and that students in those states, both as a whole and individually, had lower SAT scores (Marchant & Paulson, 2005). States with exit exams were shown to have an average graduation rate of 64.9%, while those without exit exams were shown to have an average graduation rate of 71.65%. The researchers drew upon 2002 graduation rate data from the National Center for Education Statistics and 2001 SAT scores, and adjusted for demographic and socioeconomic factors. The authors asserted that high-stakes testing presents a “potentially insurmountable” hurdle for minority students in particular and therefore results in lower graduation rates. In addition, the negative effect on SAT scores occurs because “teachers tend to narrow the scope of their curriculum to that which is tested, and they tend to abandon more innovative teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and creative projects in favor of more traditional lecture and recitation.” It should be noted, however, that the study's methodology has been criticized as flawed since it relies on just one year's data (Viadero, 2005).

Other new information about dropout rates in a state with graduation testing has emerged from the annual evaluation of California's new exit exam program being conducted by HumRRO; the findings are described in **Box 7**.

Box 7—California’s Dropout Rates on the Decline

The new California exit exam requirement has been accompanied by a decrease in dropout rates—the opposite of what most California principals and many teachers predicted (Wise et al., 2004). The CAHSEE was first administered in 2001 to ninth graders who would graduate in 2004; passing the exam will become a graduation requirement beginning with next year’s class of 2006.

The research organization HumRRO is conducting a comprehensive, multi-year evaluation of the CAHSEE program for the state of California. A requirement to evaluate CAHSEE annually by an independent organization was included in the state law that established the exam. As part of the evaluation, each year HumRRO researchers survey principals and teachers about the effects of the state exit exam. In 2004, 73% of the principals and 41% of the teachers predicted that the CAHSEE would have a negative or strongly negative impact on dropout rates (that is, the dropout rate would increase). The enrollment data since the introduction of the exit exam do not support these predictions, however.

Figure 6 shows the drop-off (or difference) in enrollments between tenth and eleventh grades for the graduating classes of 1999-2005. The tenth to eleventh grade drop-off in enrollments for the class of 2004 (the first to take the CAHSEE) was 6.8%, compared with an average of about 7.8% for each of the prior five graduating classes. The tenth to eleventh grade drop-off in enrollment for the class of 2005 was slightly less, 5.5%. Figure 6 shows a similar decline in drop-offs in enrollment from grades 11 to 12 since CAHSEE was introduced. These figures suggest that the CAHSEE requirement thus far is not associated with increased dropout rates.

Figure 6—California Enrollment Declines by High School Class

[Bar graphs]

Declines from grades 10 to 11:

1999 – 8.4%
 2000 – 7.8%
 2001 – 7.4%
 2002 – 7.9%
 2003 – 7.7%
 2004 – 6.8%
 2005 – 6.6%

Declines from grades 11 to 12:

1999 – 11.6%
 2000 – 11.0%
 2001 – 10.8%
 2002 – 10.6%
 2003 – 8.4%
 2004 – 7.7%

The researchers speculate that increased remediation efforts associated with the CAHSEE may have contributed to a decline in dropouts, although they do not rule out alternative explanations, such as reduced employment alternatives for those leaving high school early. It will be important to continue to monitor the dropout figures as the CAHSEE requirement goes into full effect for the class of 2006. The ongoing HumRRO study is a valuable resource for examining the effects of exit exams because it was designed to monitor these effects from the time of the exam’s

inception through full implementation and beyond as schools and students adjust to the new requirement.

Source: Wise et al., 2004.

Additional research on the complex interaction between graduation rates and exit exams is limited, typically focusing on specific states. During the past year, we became aware of the following findings:

- In New York, the Board of Regents and the state education department studied student performance in the eight years since the inception of the Regents as a graduation requirement. Their analysis found that test scores have increased significantly and graduation rates have increased in that time frame (New York State Education Department, 2005). Delving more deeply into the relationship between the Regents and dropout rates, state officials found that students who dropped out did so because of failing grades rather than the exit exam. Of the small percentage of students who took the Regents exam before dropping out, a large majority passed, leading officials to conclude that the Regents was not a major factor in dropout rates. Large gaps in most indicators still exist among racial groups, however.
- Reports of disparate effects for different groups emanated from Arizona. Recent AIMS pass rates indicate that overall graduation rates are expected to remain at about 70% (Kossan, 2005g). But it appears that the gaps in the graduation rates of African American, Hispanic, and Native American students compared with those of white and Asian students will widen based on the pass rates on AIMS (Kossan, 2005c). Arizona State University researcher David Garcia found that after two attempts to pass the AIMS math section, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students make up 70% of the students who appear to be stuck at the bottom. Also, pass rates on the math section for white students were twice those for African American, Hispanic, and Native American students.
- In Virginia, overall graduation rates have remained unchanged, but declines have occurred in these rates for African American and Hispanic students (Helderman, 2004; Helderman, 2005). Specifically, the graduation rate decreased between 2003 and 2004 by 5 percentage points for African American students and by 12 percentage points for Hispanics. Also, the state noted an increase in the percentage of all graduates getting modified or special diplomas meant for special education students—from 3% in 2003 to 6% in 2004. This trend was magnified for African American youth; the percentage of black graduates earning modified or special diplomas rose from 6% in 2003 to 10% in 2004. Among Hispanic students it rose from 3% to 5%.
- In Utah, state officials have expressed concern about ethnic/racial gaps in test performance for the class of 2006 and fear that data disparities may mean Hispanic students are dropping out after failing the exit exam (Lynn, 2005). More than half of the Native American, black, and Hispanic students in the class of 2006 have failed the math section of Utah's exit exam, compared with 20% of white and Asian students. State

education officials are concerned that a disparity also exists between the number of Hispanic students who are still in school and need to pass tests, and the much larger number of Hispanic students who failed the tests. Officials think this gap may mean that many Hispanic students who failed may have dropped out. With the implementation of a student-level system of identifiers next year, the state hopes to better track students and determine whether this is the case.

As Utah's case demonstrates, state officials are concerned about the effect of exit exams on graduation and dropout rates. In Washington, these concerns led the governor and the legislature to mandate a study by the state superintendent on the effect of WASL as an exit exam on dropout rates. This study is due to be completed by 2010.

In light of the concerns about graduation data described above, the Center hopes that this year's data collection will serve as a baseline for analyzing graduation rate trends. We also hope that with 45 states signing the NGA compact, graduation rate data will become more reliable and consistent over time. All states with exit exams should be conducting these kinds of longitudinal evaluations to track the effects of their reforms.

Chapter 6: Special Topic 2005

Exit Exams and English Language Learners

KEY FINDINGS

- As might be expected, English language learners—students who have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English—have lower pass rates on state exit exams than students in general. Data on the percentage of ELLs passing exit exams by the twelfth grade are limited. But in many states, the percentage of ELLs who pass the mathematics exit exam on the first try is 30 to 40 percentage points lower than the overall first-try pass rates, according to the Center’s survey of states with exit exams. In reading, the gap is often greater. This raises the possibility that large numbers of ELLs could be denied a high school diploma based on their test performance.
- Rather than developing waivers or exemptions from exit exam requirements specifically for English language learners, states are choosing to require ELLs to pass exit exams, albeit with test accommodations. Some of the most common types of accommodations available to ELLs include reading or clarifying test directions (but not test questions) in the students’ home language, and allowing students to use English-home language dictionaries and glossaries that do not contain pictures or definitions. Printed or recorded translations of tests are used in at least five states.
- Almost all states with exit exams have an implicit requirement that students should know English to graduate from high school. Consistent with this, ELLs must generally pass state exit exams in reading/language arts in English.
- Questions persist about whether exit exam scores are valid, reliable, and fair indicators of what ELLs know and can do—a situation that complicates state efforts to hold all students to the same test requirements. New strategies, which are mostly in the research stages, could increase the validity of exit exam scores for ELLs. These include reducing the complexity of the language used in the tests and accounting for cultural factors in scoring test items.
- Evidence from New York and California indicates that former ELLs—students who become proficient in English and exit ELL status—are more likely to pass exit exams and are more likely to graduate than students as a whole.
- Limited and rough information from a handful of the states we surveyed suggests that the gaps in graduation rates between ELLs and the general student population range from virtually none to about 25 percentage points. But it is very difficult to gauge the impact of exit exams on ELL graduation rates due to a lack of accurate data and disagreement among researchers about the best ways to calculate these rates. The federal No Child Left Behind Act could improve this situation in 2006 because it requires states to disaggregate test scores and graduation rates for ELLs and other student subgroups.

In this year's study of exit exams, the Center on Education Policy has focused special attention on issues related to English language learners—this includes the range of students who are foreign born or speak another language at home, and have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English. It is important to note that there is no such thing as a “typical” English language learner. They exist along a very extended continuum, from some who come with backgrounds in English and are highly educated in their own country's language to those with no understanding of their own language's structure. They include students who need to brush up their academic English to those who cannot communicate. The problem is trying to treat all of these students the same or applying the same policy to all. Their diversity suggests a much more nuanced and even individualized approach.

To shed light on special challenges associated with exit exams and ELLs, we convened an advisory panel of national experts in March 2005.¹ Panel members agreed that when it comes to the achievement gap, *ELL instruction* is of greater importance than *ELL testing*. Testing identifies the problem but alone does not solve it. In other words, the difficulties of testing ELLs should be viewed in the broader context of the challenge of providing a quality education to a diverse group of students with unique needs. The testing policies for ELLs described in this chapter are just one part of the larger issue of ELL instruction and achievement.

This chapter examines issues related to the participation of ELLs in statewide high school exit exams. It is not meant to cover all issues related to testing ELLs for other purposes, although some issues overlap across testing contexts. The first section makes the case for why ELLs merit special attention in exit exam policy discussions. The second section gives an overview of the ELL population and how these students are identified and served. The third section of this chapter describes policies and strategies states are using to include ELLs in high school exit exams. The fourth and fifth sections discuss our findings about the impact of exit exams on graduation rates for ELLs and remediation policies for ELLs. A brief final section describes some encouraging evidence about test scores and graduation rates for former ELLs—students who become proficient enough in English to exit ELL status.

WHY ELLS MERIT ATTENTION IN EXIT EXAM POLICIES

CEP chose to focus on English language learners this year for several reasons. First, the number of English language learners is growing rapidly, and issues related to ELL achievement and school completion will become more important in future debates about exit exams. Second, a very large test score gap exists on exit exams between ELLs and general education students, suggesting that large numbers of ELLs could be denied a high school diploma based on their test performance. Third, questions persist about whether exit exam results are valid, reliable, and fair

*While the group raised many of the issues discussed here, they are not responsible for the contents of this chapter, which was written by CEP staff. Panel members included David Conley, University of Oregon; Jim Crawford, National Association for Bilingual Education; Richard Duran, University of California at Santa Barbara; Patricia Gandara, University of California at Davis; Mary Alice Heuschel, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington; Charlene Rivera, George Washington University; and Deborah Short, Center for Applied Linguistics.

indicators of what ELLs know and can do, which creates a dilemma for policymakers who aim to hold all students to the same exit exam requirements.

A Growing Presence

Rapid growth in the numbers and percentages of English language learners suggests that issues related to high-stakes testing for these students will take on greater importance in coming years. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, between 1992-93 and 2002-03, the enrollment of English language learners in U.S. public schools grew by 84%, much faster than the 11% growth in the overall student population. In the 2002-03 school year, the total number of ELLs enrolled in U.S. schools was approximately 4,360,000 in the 50 states and Washington, D.C., or about 9% of total enrollment (<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>). Growth is expected to continue, as some experts predict that migration to the U.S. between 2000 and 2010 will equal that of the previous decade (Fix & Passel, 2003).

Most ELLs are concentrated in a limited number of states. California is home to about one-third of the nation's ELLs, or nearly 1.6 million students, followed by Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and Arizona. Together three states—California, Texas, and New York—enroll 57% of the nation's ELLs, reflecting the size of these states and their status as gateways for immigrants. Viewed another way, about 25% of the public school students in California are ELLs, followed by New Mexico (17% of public school enrollments), Alaska (16%), and Texas (15%).

English language learners have a growing presence in all parts of the country, and some states without a lot of experience with ELLs are now grappling with how to include these students in their testing programs. Many states that started with a very small base of ELLs are seeing remarkable growth in this population. Between 1993 and 2003, enrollments of ELLs increased by 521% in South Carolina and by 470% in North Carolina. Although the share of ELLs remains low in these states—just 2% of the student population in South Carolina and 5% in North Carolina—their needs must be factored into testing and other educational policies.

In addition, the percentage of ELLs nationwide that will have to pass an exit exam to graduate will increase dramatically over the next few years. Based on the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2002-03 school year; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/index.asp>), 39% of all ELLs attend school in the 19 states that currently require students to pass an exit exam to graduate. If we add the seven states that plan to implement an exit exam by 2012, the percentage of ELLs affected rises to 87%, based on current enrollment distributions. These states include California and Arizona, which have large ELL populations. California alone had more ELLs in the 2002-03 school year than the 19 current exit exam states combined.

Test Score Gaps for ELLs

English language learners have lower initial pass rates on exit exams than students as a whole, according to our survey of states with exit exams. (As explained in Chapter 5, the initial

pass rate refers to the percentage of students who pass a subject area test on their first try; most states offer numerous opportunities for retesting.) In mathematics, the gap in initial pass rates between ELLs and all students is as large as 30 to 40 percentage points in several states. In reading, the gap is often greater. **Table 19** compares the initial pass rates of ELLs on exit exams with these rates for all students, using data from our state survey. It is intended to show the gap in pass rates *within* states. It should not be used to make comparisons *between* states about ELL achievement or the quality of services provided to ELLs. Pass rate data from different states are not comparable because states vary greatly in the nature and content of their exit exams, the size and characteristics of their ELL population, and their testing policies for ELLs.

Table 19—Percentage of ELLs Passing State Exit Exams on the First Try, 2003-04 (unless noted)

State	All Students Math	ELLs Math	All Students Reading/Language Arts/English	ELLs Reading/Language Arts/English
Alabama	78%	59%	82%	41%
Alaska	67%	38%	70%	29%
Arizona	39%	10%	59%	12%
California	74%	49%	75%	39%
Florida	76%	48%	54%	13%
Georgia*	92%	78%	95%	64%
Idaho	86%	62%	90%	57%
Indiana**	64%	40%	68%	31%
Louisiana	77%	67%	82%	56%
Maryland	59%	36%	53%	15%
Massachusetts	85%	61%	89%***	48%***
Minnesota**	74%	40%	85%	55%
Mississippi	91%	89%	83%	54%
Nevada	48%	17%	70%	29%
New Jersey	70%	29%	82%	24%
New Mexico**	78%	66%	86%	76%
Ohio*	80%	48%	91%	62%
South Carolina	80%	67%	85%	49%
Tennessee	86%	59%	92%	59%
Texas	85%	59%	87%	42%
Utah*	72%	42%	89%	65%
Virginia	NA	NA	NA	NA
Washington	44%	10%	65%	17%

* State reported 2005 data.

** State reported 2004-05 data.

*** Data from Massachusetts include reading/language arts and writing scores combined.

Note: New York did not provide data on initial pass rates on CEP's survey. Data from North Carolina were reported only as combined results for reading and math and are not included above.

Note: This table is intended to compare pass rates within states and should NOT be used to make comparisons between states.

Table reads: In Alabama in 2004, 78% of all students passed the math section of the exit exam on their first attempt, compared with 59% of ELLs. Also in Alabama, 82% of all students passed the reading section on their first attempt, compared with 41% of ELLs.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Based on the few states that provided data, English language learners also have lower cumulative pass rates on exit exams than students as a whole. (As explained in Chapter 5, the cumulative pass rate refers to the percentage of students who pass all parts of the exam by the end of twelfth grade, in some cases after taking the test multiple times.) Many states do not have cumulative pass rate data, particularly data disaggregated by subgroup, because they are just starting to introduce data systems that track individual students' progress. Also, some states are phasing in exit exams and did not require the class of 2004 to pass the test to earn a diploma. As illustrated in **Table 20**, a large gap exists in cumulative pass rates in most of the states that were able to provide disaggregated data for ELLs. Alabama is the exception—the cumulative pass rate for ELLs is very high (98%) and slightly higher than the pass rate for all students. These figures are not readily comparable between states because they are calculated in a variety of ways (for example, states vary as to whether they include in their cumulative pass rates students who receive waivers or alternative assessments).

Table 20—Cumulative Pass Rates for ELLs on State Exit Exams, 2003-04 (unless noted)

State	All Students	ELLs
Alabama*	93%	98%
Massachusetts	96%	78%
North Carolina	94%	53%
Texas**	89%	54%

*Data for Alabama are from 2002-03.

**Texas data are for the class of 2005. Students in this cohort in Texas had an additional retesting opportunity in April 2005 that is not reflected in the data above.

Table reads: In Massachusetts, 96% of all students in the class of 2004 passed the state exit exam (in some cases after multiple retakes), compared with 78% of English language learners.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

The very large gap in pass rates between ELLs and all students presents a dilemma to policymakers. Most educators agree that it is important to hold the education system accountable for all subgroups of students. Excluding ELLs from exit exams could reduce the incentive for schools to attend to their educational needs. But unless the exit exam gap is addressed, large numbers of ELLs could be barred from receiving a high school diploma.

Concerns about Testing ELLs

Including English language learners in exit exams also raises special questions about the validity, reliability, and fairness of these tests. In our review of the research literature on ELLs and testing, we found a number of recurring concerns:

1. For ELLs, subject matter tests (such as a mathematics test) measure both academic achievement *and* language proficiency, which makes scores difficult to interpret. ELLs may fail a math exit exam administered in English because they lack important math knowledge and skills or because they have limited English language proficiency, or both.
2. Test accommodations, such as extra time or glossaries, can help ELLs demonstrate what they know and can do on academic tests. But accommodations can be misused and can change what is being measured, possibly giving ELLs an unfair advantage.
3. It is inappropriate to make high-stakes decisions about individual students, such as whether they receive a diploma, if they have not had the opportunity to learn the material being tested. Many ELLs do not receive the same instruction as other students because they spend a large portion of their school week learning English as a second language. Care must be taken to ensure that ELLs receive instruction that reflects the academic standards in all subject areas that are tested on exit the exam. If not, the exit exam may not be valid or fair for making graduation decisions for these students.

OVERVIEW OF THE ELL STUDENT POPULATION

To understand the special needs of the English language learner population, one must appreciate that this is a diverse group that includes students of many ages, speakers of hundreds of languages, and native-born children as well as immigrants. Below we provide background information about the characteristics of ELLs and how they are identified and taught. Unless otherwise noted, this information comes from reports by Kindler (2002) and Zehler et al. (2003) prepared for the U.S. Department of Education and from the Web site of the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, which is based at George Washington University and funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Grade Levels, Languages, and Country of Origin

English language learners tend to be concentrated in the lower grades. Forty-four percent of ELLs in the U.S. were enrolled in grades preK through 3 in 2000. The percentage of students who are classified as ELLs tends to decrease gradually through the upper grades. In kindergarten, ELLs comprise about 16% of the total student population. By tenth grade, the year in which most states begin to administer exit exams, ELLs make up about half that percentage (nearly 8% of student enrollments), and by twelfth grade, they constitute just over 5%.

Spanish is the home language spoken by 79% of ELLs. The second most common home language is Vietnamese, spoken by only 2% of ELLs, followed by Hmong (1.6%), Cantonese (1%) and Korean (1%). The mix of languages varies by region, however. Some states, such as Alaska, Montana, and North Dakota, report Native American languages as the most common home languages of ELLs, and several other states have significant concentrations of Hmong, Serbo-Croatian, or Russian speakers. In California, the predominant language of ELLs is Spanish, in Maine it is French, and in Minnesota it is Hmong. Altogether, 460 languages are spoken by ELLs nationwide.

Almost half of ELLs—about 46%—were born in the United States. English language learners in elementary school are more likely to have been born in this country than older ELLs. Of Spanish-speaking students, 50% were born in the U.S and 30% in Mexico.

Most ELLs know at least some spoken English. According to Zehler and colleagues' 2003 survey of school ELL coordinators, 61% of ELLs have limited English proficiency, meaning they have some difficulty using English in class. Twenty-four percent of ELLs have very limited proficiency, meaning they have considerable difficulty using English in a classroom setting, and 14% have little or no proficiency in spoken English. The level of English proficiency improves from elementary school to high school. Results from the same survey indicate that a sizeable share of ELLs—39% overall and 49% at the elementary level—have limited literacy skills in their home language, while 23% of ELLs overall and 30% at the elementary level have limited oral proficiency in their home language.

How Students Enter and Exit ELL Programs

There is no standard national method for identifying an English language learner. The No Child Left Behind legislation does include the following broad definition of “limited English proficient” student. It includes any individual aged 3 through 21 who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary school; who was either not born in the United States or has a native language other than English; and who has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English that impede his or her ability to perform at proficient levels on state assessments, successfully achieve in English-only classrooms, or participate fully in society. States and districts may narrow or broaden this definition, however, so no uniform definition is used across the country. Participants in a CEP forum on English language learners and NCLB noted that the differences between states in criteria for identifying and classifying ELLs can lead to inconsistencies across and even within states (Abedi, 2004).

School districts use a variety of data to identify ELLs, assign them to the appropriate educational setting, and decide when they should exit that setting. The most common source of data used to help identify students as ELLs is a home language survey. Required by federal law, these forms are filled out by parents of ELLs when they register their children for school. The form asks basic questions about the primary language used by the child and adults at home. From there, further assessments are often given. Other sources of data include oral proficiency tests in English, literacy tests in English, teacher judgments, writing samples in English, and results of achievement tests in English. If this information were precise and reliable enough, it could also

be used to determine which students were eligible for which alternatives or options, thereby making the process fairer on an individual basis.

The decision to assign a student to an appropriate instructional program is often made by a group of people—a combination of teachers, other school staff, and district-level staff. Typically, a review of ELL performance takes place once or twice a year to determine whether the student should have a change in type of instruction or is ready to exit ELL status. The sources of data used to decide whether a student is ready to exit ELL status are the same ones used to identify ELLs, except for the home language survey.

The majority of school districts continue to monitor the progress of ELLs after they exit ELL status, typically for one or two years. Some districts monitor former ELLs until they graduate. To monitor students after they leave ELL status, districts primarily use grades and state test scores.

Language of Instruction

Zehler et al. (2003) surveyed school districts nationally and examined the types of services provided to English language learners. She and her colleagues then classified these types of services using two criteria—the extent of extra services provided to ELLs (such as English as a second language instruction) and the percentage of instruction of the regular curriculum (mathematics, science, etc.) given in the students' home language. The different combinations of amount of services and level of home language instruction were arranged along a continuum and grouped into eight combinations, as shown in **Table 21**.

Table 21—Percentages of ELLs Receiving Different Types of Services and Instruction

Service and Instruction Type	Percentage of ELLs Receiving Service, Reported in 2003	Percentage of ELLs Receiving Service, Reported in 1993
1. No ELL services, mainstream instruction only	6.7%	2.1%
2. No ELL services, instructional support of type given to general education students	5.0%	1.4%
3. Some ELL services (<10 hours weekly), all English instruction	24.7%	19.1%
4. Some ELL services (<10 hours weekly), some native language instruction (2-24%)	8.3%	7.0%
5. Some ELL services (<10 hours weekly), significant native language instruction (>25%)	3.4%	3.1%
6. Extensive ELL services (>10 hours weekly), all English instruction	23.2%	14.6%
7. Extensive ELL services (>10 hours weekly), some native language (2-24%)	11.8%	15.8%
8. Extensive ELL services (>10 hours weekly), significant native language (>25%)	17.0%	37.0%

Table reads: In 2003, 24.7% of English language learners received less than 10 hours of services weekly designed specifically for ELLs and received all their instruction of the regular curriculum in English; this represents an increase over the 19.1% of ELLs who received these types of services and instruction in 1993.

Source: Zehler et al., 2003.

In 2003, a large majority—almost 60%—of ELLs received instruction of the regular curriculum solely in English (the sum of types 1, 2, 3, and 6 in Table 21). This group included students who received no specialized ELL services (11.7%, adding types 1 and 2), those who received less than 10 hours per week of specialized ELL services (24.7%), and those who received more than 10 hours per week of specialized ELL services (23.2%). The degree of instruction in English is lower in elementary school and increases as students move on to high school. By tenth grade, the grade in which most states begin giving exit exams, about 74% of ELLs are receiving all of their instruction in English.

Over the past decade, instruction in English has increased greatly, while significant instruction in the home language has shrunk by half. In 1993, a minority of ELLs, about 37%, were taught their regular subjects solely in English, while just over 40% received more than a quarter of their instruction in their home language. In addition, the percentage of ELLs receiving more than 10 hours of specialized ELL services each week has declined from about 67% in 1993 to 52% in 2003. Although Zehler and her colleagues did not give a reason for this decline, one could speculate that it is partly due to the 1998 passage of Proposition 227 in California (and similar laws in Massachusetts and Arizona), which restricted the practice of bilingual education. According to one study, the percentage of California's ELLs served in bilingual education programs fell from 29% in 1997-98 to 12% after Proposition 227 passed (Gandara, 2000).

TESTING POLICIES FOR ELLS

Consistent with the nationwide movement to hold all students to the same high standards, states with exit exams are trying to the extent possible to require English language learners to pass the same tests as all other students. But as discussed above, states must confront two main issues in the process: first, the very large achievement gap between ELLs and general education students, and second, lingering concerns about whether exit exam results are valid, reliable, and fair indicators of what ELLs know and can do. There are two strategies available to states to address these issues. One strategy is to include ELLs in the regular exit exam, but with accommodations. The other is to allow ELLs to earn a diploma through alternate means or exempt them from the exit exam requirement altogether. Our survey of states with current or planned exit exams found that states are pursuing the first strategy—including ELLs in exit exams through accommodations or similar means. With a few minor exceptions, states do not specifically exempt ELLs from exit exams. No states have any special alternate routes to a diploma for ELLs that are not available to all other students.

Strategies for Inclusion

Accommodations

This year's survey, like last year's, shows that accommodations remain the primary strategy states are using to include English language learners in exit testing. All states grant regular diplomas to ELLs who pass the exit exam with accommodations. Accommodations are intended to level the playing field—that is, to make language less of a factor when measuring performance in academic subjects other than English language arts. But they are not meant to alter what is being measured.

Table 22—Most Commonly Allowed Testing Accommodations for ELLs

Accommodation	Number of States
Scheduling/setting	
Individual or small group administration in separate location	19
Extra time	14
Several shorter test sessions	11
Breaks during testing	12
Directions	
Reading or clarifying directions in home language	18
Repeating or simplifying directions in English or answering questions	12
Special test administrator (e.g., ESL teacher)	9
Presentations of test questions	
Use of English-home language dictionaries or glossaries	16
Reading test questions aloud in English (except reading test)	15
Responses	
Student responds verbally and proctor transcribes answers onto answer sheet	6
Student marks answers directly in test booklet	6

Table reads: Nineteen states allow ELLs to receive the scheduling/setting accommodation of an individual or small group test administration in a separate location.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

Table 22 lists the types of accommodations most frequently allowed for ELLs (those allowed by five or more states). The most common accommodation is to allow ELLs to take the test individually or in small groups in a separate location—settings that also facilitate the administration of other types of accommodations. Next most common is reading test directions aloud in the student's home language or allowing students to ask for clarifications of directions in their home language. Some states allow the actual test questions to be read aloud in English (as long as the test is not assessing reading). The most common accommodation that directly

addresses the lack of language proficiency among ELLs is the use of various types of dictionaries or glossaries—mostly glossaries from English to the home language and vice versa, but not dictionaries with pictures or definitions. Other popular accommodations include giving students extra time, allowing them breaks during testing, or breaking up the test into shorter test sessions. Some of the accommodations that states allow for ELLs appear to be carried over from accommodation policies for students with disabilities. For instance, it is unclear why allowing ELLs to mark their answers directly in the test booklet would address the special language issues confronting ELLs. A less common accommodation is allowing a test administrator to orally translate a test for a student or to answer questions about test items during testing (without giving answers). According to our survey, only four states allow it. This type of accommodation is probably less popular because it involves subjective judgments and could subtly alter the material being tested. Indiana, for example, expressly forbids this practice.

Ideally, accommodations should reduce the impact of language but not give ELLs an unfair advantage over students who are not permitted accommodations. In other words, accommodations should have no effect on native English-speaking students while reducing the language barrier for ELLs. But this may not always be the case. For instance, a glossary plus extra time was found to raise performance for both ELLs and non-ELLs, which raises concerns about the validity of the scores achieved with this type of help (Abedi et al., 2000). Access to English dictionaries or home language dictionaries can give an unfair advantage to ELLs by affording them access to content-related terms. A customized dictionary that does not contain words that assist students with test content appears to be a more promising accommodation (Abedi, 2001). Choosing appropriate accommodations is complex, and the research to help make these choices is limited but growing. Institutions that are leading research in this area include UCLA's Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (www.cresst.org) and the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota (education.umn.edu/nceo/default.html).

Translations

According to our survey, most states do not translate exit exams into languages other than English. By translations, we mean instances where there is a standardized printed or recorded version of the test in another language, as opposed to oral translations by a test administrator as described above in the discussion on accommodations. Of the 25 states that responded to our survey, 5 states provide translations:

- New York's translation program is probably the most extensive. Regents exams in all subjects other than Comprehensive English are translated into five languages: Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.
- Massachusetts provides a Spanish version of its mathematics test.
- Minnesota translates its mathematics test into Spanish, Hmong, and Vietnamese.
- Ohio provides CDs of the reading and mathematics tests in five languages—Arabic, Somali, Chinese, Spanish, and Korean.

- New Mexico offers tests in Spanish in all subject areas.

English language learners in all of the above states except New Mexico must still take at least part of the reading/language arts test in English. For instance, in Ohio, students must read passages on the reading test in English, and must complete the writing test in English. In New Mexico, Spanish-speaking students have the option of taking a Spanish-language version of the exit exam in all subject areas.

Many states do not translate their exit exams because translations can be expensive, and some languages have a variety of dialects that may not be familiar to some students. Moreover, it is difficult to develop valid, equivalent translations. In a study that looked at Spanish translations of mathematics items on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the discrepancies in student performance on the same test questions across the two languages indicated that for many items, the Spanish and English versions may not have been measuring the same underlying math knowledge (Anderson, Jenkins & Miller, 1996). In short, the translation changed the meaning of the questions.

Some research shows that translated assessments are not necessarily beneficial for all ELLs. Butler and Stevens (1997) and Thurlow and colleagues (1998) assert that students who have not received extensive schooling in their home language may not be familiar with academic vocabulary in that language. When the language of instruction is English, translating test items into students' home languages may be more confusing than helpful if students have begun to associate certain content and concepts with English. On the other hand, translated tests may be appropriate for some ELLs, such as those who are receiving instruction in their home language or are currently receiving English-only instruction but were recently educated in another country (August & Hakuta, 1997). This research suggests that as a general rule of thumb, the language of the assessment should match the student's primary language of instruction because assessment should be aligned with instruction. As noted above, by the tenth grade, about three-quarters of ELLs are instructed in English.

Reducing language complexity

One strategy that has been shown to benefit English language learners is to minimize the language complexity of test items, which involves modifying and simplifying the language of test questions without reducing the rigor of what is being tested (see **Box 8**). Using this method, researchers have been able to repeatedly improve ELL performance on many tests and narrow the gap between ELLs' and other students' performance (see, for example, Abedi & Lord, 2001). This suggests that in the future, new tests might be designed from the start to minimize unnecessary language complexity, unless comprehension of English is what is being tested.

Box 8—Reducing the Language Complexity of Mathematics Tests

To explore the impact of students' language background on their performance on mathematics word problems, Abedi and Lord (2001) gave students released NAEP items, along with parallel

items that were modified to reduce their linguistic complexity. Some examples of language features that were modified include the following:

- Passive verb forms were changed to active.
Marble is taken from the bag > If you take a marble from the bag
- Long word groups functioning as nouns (nominals) were shortened.
The pattern of the puppy's weight gain > The pattern above
- Relative clauses were removed or recast.
The total number of newspapers that Lee delivers in 5 days > How many newspapers does he deliver in 5 days
- Complex question phrases were changed to simple question words.
Which is the best approximation of the number > Approximately how many
- Abstract or impersonal presentations were made more concrete.
2,675 radios sold > 2,675 radios that Mrs. Jones sold

Interviews revealed that students preferred and scored higher on the items that were simpler linguistically. In general, the language modifications had greater benefit for low-performing students: ELLs benefited more than proficient speakers of English; students from low-income families benefited more than others; and students in low-level and average math classes benefited more than those in high-level math and algebra classes. A cause for concern, however, is that ELLs scored significantly lower than proficient speakers of English even when the language was simplified. Although the researchers recognized that language proficiency had important effects on test performance, they concluded that attributing poor performance entirely to the language of the test is inappropriate (Abedi & Dietel, 2004).

As mentioned above, accommodations should reduce the language barrier for ELLs but have no effect on native English speakers. A study by Rivera and Stansfield (2004) examined the effects of linguistic simplification of fourth and sixth grade science test items on a state assessment. The results showed that linguistic simplification was not helpful to native English-speaking students who received the accommodation, which provides some support for the validity of this accommodation approach.

Source: Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi & Dietel, 2004; and Rivera & Stansfield, 2004.

The idea of using simplified language in assessment is part of a broader idea in test development known as universal design (National Center on Educational Outcomes Web site, <http://education.umn.edu>). This notion borrows from a trend in architecture and design that aspires to maximum accessibility for all persons, including those with special needs. Similarly, universal design of assessment is aimed at maximum accessibility and applicability of assessment for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Proponents of universal design in assessment hold that tests should be developed with all groups of students in mind, should use more simple and universally understood graphics, and should use language as simple as possible in areas where language is not being tested. Under this type of approach,

fewer accommodations would presumably be necessary. Large-scale test developers may be starting to pay more attention to this area. For more about developing tests that are maximally accessible and more likely to produce valid scores for ELLs, see the comprehensive guide, *Ensuring Accuracy for the Testing of English Language Learners* (Kopriva, 2000).

A related strategy for improving the validity of test scores for English language learners involves training people in specialized techniques for scoring these students' written responses to open-ended test questions. Not yet widely used, this strategy is described in **Box 9**.

Box 9—Special Considerations in Scoring ELL Responses to Open-ended Mathematics Questions

The written responses of English language learners to open-ended test questions are often different from those of general education students. ELLs' responses can easily be misread by scorers in large-volume testing situations, such as state exit exams. Scorers are typically monolingual English speakers who have not been specifically trained in scoring ELLs' responses and who are expected to score a large number of papers in a short time. For these reasons, Kopriva and Saez (1997) developed the *Guide to Scoring LEP Student Responses to Open-ended Mathematics Items*, which helps train scorers in ways to evaluate more accurately the nonstandard oral and written responses of ELLs. The guide familiarizes scorers with linguistic and cultural issues that may affect how particular language groups respond to test items. To give just a few examples, ELLs often do the following:

- Mix languages in their answers
I put the forks en las mesas
- Follow the rules of syntax or word order used in the home language
"The house blue" instead of the blue house
- Use spelling conventions from their first language
"Eschool" instead of school
- Merge words
"Ghaudayamean" for what do you mean?
- Use mathematical symbols from their home country
Some European and Latin countries use periods instead of commas when writing numbers; in some countries the symbol for long division is a slash, 3/927.
- Apply cultural influences
Confuse monetary systems or the metric vs. standard systems

- Use circular reasoning or a deductive reasoning approach, a stylistic preference in some cultures
Lead up to a point or topic sentence by presenting arguments in a series of often lengthy paragraphs rather than stating the point at the outset

Culture can also affect a student's interpretation of a test question, an issue that should be considered in both developing and scoring test items. Kopriva and Saez give the following example of a math problem:

“...an assessment item that asks students to create a fair race may elicit unexpected responses from some students. Whereas the creator of the item expects students to create a race-course in which all of the contestants have to run equal distances, some students may interpret fair to mean that all contestants have an equal chance of winning—this may be especially true in cultures that do not emphasize competition. As a result, these students may create a race-course in which the slower contestants will run shorter distances. On the basis of their interpretation of a race and the notion of fairness, this is a valid response.”

Source: Kopriva & Saez, 1997.

Academic English language measures

Although English language learners can often acquire basic conversational skills quite quickly, it typically takes three to five years for them to develop true oral proficiency. Developing academic English language proficiency takes even longer, an average of four to seven years (Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000). “Academic language” generally refers to the language used in the classroom or other academic contexts for the purpose of acquiring knowledge. For example, the academic expression “greater than” must be learned specifically in the context of mathematics, but in English instruction, the word “great” is rarely used anymore to indicate size, so that can be confusing for ELLs.

Some researchers have suggested that ELLs should take academic language tests to assess whether they are ready for the state's standardized, subject area exams, such as exit exams. These researchers claim that academic language tests would help to enhance the validity of ELLs' standardized test scores because they would show whether ELLs have reached a linguistic level similar to that of native English-speaking test-takers—the point at which their language ability has less effect on test scores (Steven, Butler & Castellon-Wellington, 2000). Evidence from California, discussed later in this chapter in the section on former ELLs, appears to support this claim.

Few current English language proficiency tests are specifically designed to measure academic language. Most provide little information about how well students can process the more complex language found in state achievement tests of mathematics or science, for example. This paucity of assessments is partly because developing academic language measures is challenging. Linguistics experts explain that English proficiency and content knowledge may be

inextricably linked—that is, the more tests items are designed to measure higher-order aspects of language use, the more they include content knowledge and skills (Olson, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act, with its requirement to test ELLs' English proficiency annually, is causing more resources to be poured into the development of language proficiency tests (see **Box 10** on NCLB policies for testing ELLs and the implications for graduation testing). It remains to be seen whether these tests will measure academic English proficiency, and if so, whether they will be useful for determining if students are ready to take exit exams.

Box 10—No Child Left Behind, English Language Learners, and Exit Exams

The No Child Left Behind Act is having a broad impact on state testing policies, including how states test English language learners for graduation purposes. Twenty of the states with exit exams are using those same tests to comply with NCLB testing requirements at the high school level. As a result, NCLB policies for testing ELLs now tend to apply to exit exams in those states.

Titles I and III of NCLB have particular relevance for English language learners. Title I requires ELLs to be tested with the same state assessments used for all other students, and it allows state-approved accommodations to be offered as necessary. Title I also requires states, districts, and schools to report separate test results for the ELL subgroup and to show that this group is making adequate yearly progress according to the law's criteria. Policy changes in 2004 allowed a little more flexibility in testing ELLs. States may opt to exempt ELLs from state reading/language arts tests during their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools, but these students must still take state mathematics tests. In addition, the scores of ELLs during their first year in the country do not have to be included when determining whether a school or district has made adequate yearly progress, and when calculating adequate yearly progress, states can include former ELLs in the ELL subgroup for up to two years after they have achieved English proficiency.

Title III of NCLB requires states to establish English language proficiency standards that address the five domains of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. States must conduct an annual assessment of English language proficiency of all ELLs, set annual measurable objectives for increasing the percentage of ELLs who attain English proficiency, and hold school districts accountable for meeting those objectives.

Prior to NCLB, many states were exempting ELLs from state testing, and few were reporting ELL results as a separate group, so NCLB is focusing more attention on both the language and academic achievement of ELLs. As described in our 2005 report on NCLB implementation, many states are developing new English language tests that meet NCLB requirements (Center on Education Policy, 2005a). Several states are developing these assessments collaboratively through consortia, some are using commercial assessments, a few states have developed their own tests, and some require school districts to adopt their own exams to measure English language proficiency.

No Child Left Behind is also having possible unforeseen consequences for ELL testing. In California, 10 school districts with high percentages of ELLs have sued the state to allow ELLs to take standardized tests, including the California high school exit exam, in their native

languages. CAHSEE is used to determine whether high schools have made adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The suit accuses the state of failing to comply with NCLB and contends that since California does not give the CAHSEE in other languages, ELLs cannot demonstrate their proficiency in some areas, and therefore schools and districts with many ELLs are more likely to fall short of making adequate yearly progress. Attorneys for the districts say their issue is not with NCLB but with California's implementation of it (Gonzales, 2005). A similar lawsuit was recently filed by the Reading school district in Pennsylvania (Zehr, 2005).

Chapter 7 of the 2005 report on NCLB by the Center on Education Policy contains a more thorough review of NCLB policies for ELLs.

Source: Center on Education Policy, 2005a; Gonzales, 2005; and Zehr, 2005.

Exemptions and Alternate Routes to a Diploma

For the most part, English language learners are not exempt from taking exit exams, aside from the one-year postponement allowed by NCLB. Of the 25 states that responded to our survey, 23 did not allow exemptions from the test for ELLs and 2 allowed some exemptions. Idaho, which is phasing in its ISAT exit exam geared to the tenth grade level for the class of 2008, allows ELLs in the classes of 2006 and 2007 an exemption if they have been enrolled in state schools for less than three years. In 2008 this exemption will no longer be permitted. In Minnesota, exemptions are allowed for ELLs who have been enrolled for less than three years.

No state allows any alternate routes to a diploma to ELLs that are not open to general education students, nor does any state offer a special diploma specifically for ELLs who cannot pass the exit exam.

English Proficiency Requirement

As described above, most states with exit exams do not exempt English language learners from testing, do not allow special alternate routes to a diploma, and do not provide translations of the tests (at least of English language arts tests). These policies are consistent with the implicit understanding among most exit exam states that English proficiency is a requirement for graduation. CEP surveyed states with exit exams about whether they had official policies requiring graduating high school students to be competent in English. The survey specifically asked: Does the state have an official position (e.g. law or policy) stating that students must be competent in the English language in order to receive a high school diploma?

Of the states that responded, three—Alabama, California, and New York—answered that they have a stated policy or law that students must be competent in English to receive a high school diploma. But the official policies provided by those states simply declared that students must pass the English portion of the exit exam in English. Seventeen other states reported that English competency is more of an implied requirement, in that all students must pass an exit exam to graduate and English is a major subject covered by that exam—therefore, competency in English is necessary to graduate. This type of de facto requirement is not really very different from the kinds of policies found in the three states listed above. Only three states—Idaho, Utah,

and New Mexico—indicated that competency in English is not required to receive a high school diploma in their states. Idaho and Utah officials did not elaborate, but New Mexico officials responded that the state’s constitution “strongly promotes bilingualism in education and the rights of native Spanish speakers.” This explains New Mexico’s policy of allowing ELLs to pass all parts of its exit exam in Spanish to earn a diploma.

EXIT EXAMS AND ELL GRADUATION RATES

A major question facing policymakers is whether exit exams cause more English language learners to drop out of high school. Trying to gauge the impact of exit exams on ELLs is difficult, mostly because of a lack of data. A recent Education Trust study (Hall, 2005) found that few states could supply disaggregated ELL graduation rates for 2002-03. We also received limited data for 2003-04. Only 10 states were able to respond to our survey question about ELL graduation rates, most likely for reasons described below. As shown in **Table 23**, the gap in graduation rates between ELLs and all students in these states ranges from virtually none to more than 25 percentage points.

Table 23—Graduation Rates for All Students and ELLs, 2003-04 (unless noted)

State	Percentage of All Students Receiving a High School Diploma	Percentage of ELLs Receiving a High School Diploma
Florida	72%	47%
Georgia	65%	41%
Louisiana	88%	79%
Maryland	84%	86%
Minnesota*	88%	65%
New Mexico	89%	73%
North Carolina	96%	88%
Ohio	84%	74%
South Carolina	77%	49%
Washington*	66%	50%

*Data are from school year 2002-03.

Note: Disaggregated graduation rate data for ELLs were not available from other states.

Table reads: In Georgia 65% of all students received a high school diploma in 2004, compared with 41% of ELLs.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

As we have pointed out in our previous annual reports on exit exams, trying to measure the impact of exit exams on graduation rates is difficult because of data problems and because dropping out of school tends to be a complex process rather than the result of a single event that can be isolated and measured. Moreover, experts disagree about the best way to measure graduation rates. Many researchers believe that the way most states measure graduation rates is

not entirely accurate and that actual graduation rates are lower than those reported by states (Greene & Winters, 2002; Greene & Winters, 2003; Swanson, 2004; and Hall, 2005). These same problems complicate efforts to determine the impact of exit exams on the graduation rates of English language learners. Some studies have looked at how exit exams affect specific groups of students, but they do not break out numbers for ELLs in the same way they do for racial and ethnic minority groups. Researchers lack the necessary data because, until recently, most states were not required to disaggregate graduation figures for ELLs, which they now must do under No Child Left Behind. Disaggregated graduation data will not be available until late 2006, however, because graduation rates are calculated by comparing the number of twelfth graders with the number of ninth graders four years earlier, and the baseline number of ELLs in ninth grade was only established in the 2002-03 school year.

New York State and New York City, perhaps because of their status as a gateway for new immigrants, tracked ELL graduation rates prior to the NCLB requirement. Studies by the state's Board of Regents confirm that ELLs have lower graduation rates than all students. The Regents' studies also point out that in the case of ELLs, calculating a four-year graduation rate gives no information about whether students undergo extra years of schooling and eventually get a diploma. A study prepared for the Board of Regents (New York State Education Department, 2003) indicates that many ELLs stay in high school for longer than four years, although it does not indicate whether they receive a diploma as a result (see **Table 24**).

Table 24—Graduation Status in June 2002 of Students Who Entered New York State High Schools in 1998

Graduation Status	English Proficient	Limited English Proficient
Received IEP (special education) diploma	1%	1%
Enrolled in GED program	2%	4%
Dropout	7%	9%
Still enrolled in school	13%	48%
Graduated with regular diploma	77%	38%
Total	100%	100%

Table reads: Among limited English proficient students who entered New York high schools in 1998, by 2002 1% had received an IEP, 4% were enrolled in a GED program, 9% had dropped out, 48% were still enrolled in school, and 38% had graduated with a regular diploma.

Source: New York State Education Department, 2003.

A study by New York City's Board of Education, which tracks students for three years after twelfth grade, indicates that many ELLs who do not graduate after four years do end up receiving a diploma a few years later. In short, it takes ELLs longer to graduate. For the class of 2001, only 31.4% of ELLs graduated on time in June 2001. But a year later, in June 2002, 44.1% of the ELLs in the class of 2001 had graduated, and by 2004, 49.6% of ELLs had graduated. Unfortunately, the graduation rate was still virtually equal to the dropout rate (New York City

Department of Education, 2005a). In any case, the New York state and city studies do suggest that policy discussions about ELL graduation rates and the impact of exit exams should consider the possibility that many ELLs stay in high school longer than four years. Many states allow numerous opportunities to retake exit exams after twelfth grade or allow former students to take exit exams until they are 21.

The Zehler (2003) study was also unable to secure adequate data to determine ELL graduation or dropout rates. But like the New York Regents study, the Zehler study indicates that ELLs are slightly more likely to receive a GED than all students. The researchers' survey of district-level ELL coordinators indicated that the types of diplomas received by ELLs and former ELLs were nearly identical to those received by all students. About 98% of all students who graduated, as well as 98% of ELLs, received a regular diploma. About 0.6% of all students received a GED, compared with 1% of ELLs and 0.8% of former ELLs.

The yearly evaluation of California's exit exam by the HumRRO research group provides some interesting data about how students *perceive* exit exams will affect their likelihood of graduating (Wise et al., 2004). The researchers asked students, through a questionnaire administered after each part of the exam, whether they believed the requirement to pass a test like the CAHSEE would make it harder for them to graduate from high school. **Table 25** shows that a higher percentage of ELLs reported that the test would make it a lot harder to graduate than all students did.

Table 25—Students' Perceptions about the Impact of the CAHSEE on High School Graduation, for ELLs and All Students in the Graduating Class of 2006

Impact of test on graduation	English/Language Arts		Mathematics	
	ELLs	All Students	ELLs	All Students
A lot harder	40%	21%	42%	24%
Somewhat harder	34%	34%	40%	40%
Not much harder	13%	34%	13%	31%
Don't know	12%	11%	9%	7%
Total*	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Totals may not equal exactly 100% due to rounding.

Table reads: In California, 40% of ELL students in the class of 2006 described the English/language arts section of the CAHSEE as making high school graduation a lot harder, compared with 21% of all students.

Source: Wise et al., 2004.

The class of 2006 will be the first required to pass the CAHSEE to graduate. It will be informative to follow the independent evaluation of the CAHSEE program—the most comprehensive longitudinal evaluation of an exit exam program being conducted—to see

whether any evidence emerges in future years showing that the test is affecting high school dropout rates for all students and subgroups. Some preliminary findings for all students are described in Box 7 in Chapter 5.

In sum, due to limitations in data and research methods, it is not yet possible to gauge the impact of exit exams on ELL graduation rates. It is not even possible at this point to calculate an ELL graduation rate for every state. As a result of NCLB, the data situation should improve in 2006.

REMEDICATION FOR ELLS

According to our survey, no state has established a state-level program targeted specifically at helping English language learners pass exit exams. But that does not mean ELLs have nowhere to turn. English language learners have access to a range of remediation programs which are available to general education students (see Chapter 4). Special remediation programs expressly for ELLs tend to be offered at the district level, whereas our survey was aimed at state officials. Some states mentioned in their responses that districts can use funds under Title III of NCLB specifically to help ELLs pass state exams. States also have a variety of programs that encourage the academic progress of ELLs in general but are not geared specifically toward passing exit exams.

FORMER ELLS

Much of this chapter has focused on achievement gaps and testing issues for English language learners. The challenges are quite daunting. But on a positive note, some evidence has emerged from two states, California and New York, that ELLs who become proficient enough in English to exit ELL status do rather well in terms of test scores and graduation rates.

The evaluation of California's exit exam found that ELLs who have been reclassified as proficient in English performed better than the general student population on the exam (Wise et al., 2004). The researchers compared the pass rates for students who are currently ELLs and students who were previously ELLs but had been reclassified as English proficient. The results for the class of 2006, shown in **Table 26**, are striking. Pass rates on the English language arts test were understandably low for ELLs, 38% compared with 73% for all students. Perhaps because former ELLs had to demonstrate language proficiency to be reclassified, students who were no longer ELLs passed at higher rates than all students, 85% compared with 73%. In addition, students who were reclassified as proficient in English also had higher pass rates on the mathematics test than students in general, 82% versus 72%.

Table 26—Initial Pass Rates on the CAHSEE for ELLs, Reclassified ELLs, and All Students for the Graduating Class of 2006

Group	Initial Pass Rate English/Language Arts	Initial Pass Rate Mathematics
English language learners	38%	48%
Reclassified as proficient in English	85%	82%
All students	73%	72%

Table reads: In California, 38% of ELL students in the class of 2006 passed the ELA section of the CAHSEE on their first attempt, compared with 85% of students reclassified as proficient in English and 73% of all students.

Source: Wise et al., 2004.

A similar trend may be true for graduation rates. New York City researchers found that former ELLs—those who have exited ELL status and are proficient in English—have higher graduation rates than non-ELLs. For the class of 2001, the graduation rate for former ELLs was 58.7%, compared with 52.8% for all students. By 2004, 75.4% of former ELLs in the class of 2001 had received a diploma, compared with 69.2% of non-ELLs. This pattern of high graduation rates for former ELLs also held true for the class of 2004 (New York City Department of Education, 2005b).

These studies support the idea that English language ability has a significant effect on the exit exam results of ELLs, not just in reading/language arts but also in math. This research also suggests that once ELLs achieve English proficiency, exit exams should not pose a greater barrier for them than for other students.

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State Profiles

Alabama

Test Name: Alabama High School Graduation Exam, 3rd Edition

Subjects Tested: Reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies

Initial Grade Tested: 11

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The purpose of the state's exit exam is to ensure "that all Alabama students had the opportunity to learn the minimum knowledge in the core courses to earn a high school diploma."

Historical and Policy Background

Alabama began administering exit exams in 1985 with the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (ASHGE) 1st Edition, and in 1995 implemented a second edition of the exam titled the High School Basic Skills Exit Exam. The second edition of the exam was phased out, and seniors in spring 2004 had to pass all subject-area tests of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition.

AHSGE testing policies have changed over time from testing three subjects to testing five subjects. The exam also moved from testing basic skills to testing grade 11 state standards. In addition, the state decided to allow the GED to be used as an alternate exam for the AHSGE and added a waiver for special education students.

Test Characteristics

The Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition is first offered to students in the spring of tenth grade as a pre-graduation exam. But if students pass one or more subject tests during this pre-graduation administration, they will receive credit toward graduation for passing those subjects. Students following the normal rate of progression in grades 9 through 12 have four opportunities to take the AHSGE: a spring administration in the eleventh grade, and fall, midyear, and spring administrations in the twelfth grade. Students will also have an option to take the AHSGE during the summer between eleventh and twelfth grades. In total, students may take the exam as many as six times. The state reports that the AHSGE 3rd Edition is a standards-based exam aligned to grade 11 standards. It was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The state reports that the test has undergone a review to determine whether it is aligned to state standards in math, reading, and science. The state also reports conducting a study to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exams. The reviews have not been published.

The Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition tests reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies. The test consists of multiple-choice questions. The AHSGE is not timed. All students are allowed to use the state-approved calculator on the math test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the AHSGE to receive diplomas. (Private school and home-schooled students do not receive diplomas with the state of Alabama seal.)

NCLB

Since school year 2003-04, the results of the AHSGE 3rd Edition have been used to determine adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act in reading and math. The science section of the exam will also be used to meet the science testing requirement of NCLB in 2007-08.

The state will use the passing score to award high school diplomas, but it has established an advanced level of performance for NCLB proficiency. Student scores from the spring administration in grade 11 are the ones that will count for NCLB purposes.

Scoring and Reporting

The performance levels for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition are fail (levels I and II), pass (level III), and advanced (level IV). The tests are scored on a scale of 0-999, and the passing scores are 563 for reading, 560 for language, 477 for mathematics, 491 for science, and 509 for social studies. The results are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents three weeks after the administration of the exam. Results are reported to the public once a year. Reports include information on whether the student passes or fails each subject area test and masters specific skills within each subject area not passed during the administration. Test questions are not released each year, but some are released through documents on the state's website.

When students fail the exit exam, the district is required to provide them with information to help them prepare for future administrations of the test. There is no standard form for providing this information.

The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have four opportunities to retake the exam by the end of twelfth grade. The state reports that it does not collect information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the AHSGE. The first retest option is during the summer after eleventh grade. If a student meets all other graduation requirements except passing the AHSGE, he or she can retake the exam after the twelfth grade, but the state does not collect information on pass rates for those students. There are no limits on age or the number of times a student can retake an exam.

The state currently does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Alabama. If general education students fail the state exit exam, Alabama allows the GED to be substituted for the AHSGE 3rd Edition. No data are available, however, on how many students use this option. There are no alternate diplomas or certificates available for general education students who do not receive regular diplomas. There is also no waiver or appeals process in place.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows the following testing accommodations for students with disabilities: breaks during testing, test administration in several sessions, small-group administration, and oral administration of the exam except for reading. In addition, the state has developed exit exam materials in Braille and large print. These accommodations are the same as those allowed on other statewide tests.

Students with disabilities can also receive an Alabama Occupational Diploma or can apply for a waiver to obtain a regular diploma if they do not pass the AHSGE.

Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma.

English Language Learners

The state allows the following testing accommodations for students identified as limited English proficient: breaks during testing, test administration in several sessions, small-group administration, use of dictionaries and glossaries, oral administration of the exam except for reading, and exam instructions in English or the native language. These accommodations are the same as those allowed on other statewide tests.

English language learners are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for too short a time. The state does not offer the AHSGE in languages other than English, since it has an official position stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma.

There are no appeals, waiver processes, special certificates, or diplomas for English language learners who do not pass the high school exit exam. Alabama school systems are required to offer remediation to help students pass the test.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the AHSGE, although students are not required to attend remedial programs. The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the AHSGE, including training teachers how to teach test-taking skills, familiarizing teachers with the content of the AHSGE, providing materials with activities for teaching content of the AHSGE, and training teachers in how to interpret test results. The state has not developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for the exams for students.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exam.

Student Outcomes

*Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2003-04**

Subgroups	Math	Reading	Science	Social Studies	Language Arts
All students	78.1%	82.2%	86.9%	74.3%	81.1%
White	85.0%	90.8%	91.9%	82.0%	87.5%
Black	65.0%	66.6%	78.2%	60.2%	69.5%
Hispanic	69.6%	66.9%	74.1%	58.8%	63.5%
Asian	91.6%	84.3%	87.4%	79.0%	84.5%
Native American	83.1%	88.7%	91.2%	80.0%	87.5%
English language learners/LEP	58.8%	40.6%	44.0%	29.8%	33.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch	66.2%	69.4%	77.8%	60.7%	69.6%
Fully paid lunch	84.2%	88.7%	91.6%	60.7%	86.9%
Students with disabilities	27.1%	39.8%	38.0%	32.3%	27.3%
General education students	82.0%	85.4%	90.7%	77.4%	85.2%
Male	76.0%	83.5%	84.6%	77.2%	76.6%
Female	80.1%	81.0%	89.3%	77.4%	85.4%

*Note: Students actually take the test for the first time in the spring of tenth grade, but these rates are for the spring administration during eleventh grade, when the exam first counts toward the graduation requirement.

Cumulative Pass Rates for Students in Grade 12 in 2002-03

Subgroups

All students	92.5%
White	96.2%
Black	85.6%
Hispanic	83.8%
Asian	94.3%
Native American	92.9%
English language learners/LEP	98.2%
Free or reduced-price lunch	85.8%
Students with disabilities	65.9%

Note: More recent data are not available.

The cumulative pass rates were calculated as follows: The state maintains a database of all students who have taken the test with scores from all administrations and the number of students enrolled on the first day of testing for each school district. The first day of testing enrollment data show the students' grade levels. The information from the first day of testing enrollment file is used to determine who is a twelfth grader in each school, and these students are matched with their test data. The number of twelfth graders who pass all subjects is divided by the total number of twelfth graders. The pass rate does include the students who received a waiver, took the alternate assessment, or met the graduation requirement through other means.

Graduation Rates

The state reports that it is unable to calculate a graduation rate until the new student-level identifier system is in place. The state expects to be able to report graduation rate data in 2005-06.

Higher Education

According to CEP's 2003 study of high school exit exams, some public universities and community colleges indicated that they use the AHSGE scores to make decisions about undergraduate admissions. Students can, however, be admitted to both public universities and public community colleges if they have a GED.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

Alaska

Test Name: Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam

Subjects Tested: Reading, writing, and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Minimum competency

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The purpose of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) is to determine student competency in the areas of reading, English, and mathematics.

Historical and Policy Background

The Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam was approved by the state legislature in 1997 through Alaska Statute 14.03.075—Secondary Student Competency Testing. This is the state’s first-ever exit exam, and there are no plans to replace the HSGQE at this time.

The state began administering the exam in March 2000. An earlier version of the exam contained material that all high school students were not exposed to before taking the exam. The exam was re-focused in 2001 to become a test of essential skills that all high school students are taught. Originally, diplomas were scheduled to be withheld for the class of 2002, but in April 2001, the legislature passed SB 133, which delayed the withholding of diplomas until the class of 2004. This bill also allowed students with individualized education programs to get diplomas either by passing all three competency tests with or without accommodations or by successfully completing an alternative assessment program that conforms to the state performance standards established for the competency examination.

On March 16, 2004, disabilities advocates filed a class action lawsuit against the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development, two state department of education officials, and the Anchorage School District, demanding that Alaska’s exit exam be made more accessible to students with disabilities. As a result of the lawsuit, state Attorney General Gregg Renkes and Education Commissioner Roger Sampson filed a joint stipulation in U.S. District Court on April 7, 2004, to allow students with disabilities in the class of 2004 to receive a diploma without passing the state’s high school exit exam. These students will still need to complete all other state and district graduation requirements.

Under a settlement reached in August 2004, disabled students will be offered alternative ways to demonstrate they have achieved proficiency in math, reading, and writing, as measured against the same standards that apply to other students. The exit exam will be a graduation requirement for students with disabilities in the spring of 2005, and the range of accommodations available to students with disabilities will be broadened.

Test Characteristics

In 2005, the exam was administered in April. Retests are given in October and during the spring administration of the exam.

The state considers the HSGQE to be a minimum competency test. It was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. It has undergone review by external reviewers to determine whether it is aligned to state standards, but findings are not publicly available.

The HSGQE tests math, reading, and writing in grade 10. The test consists of multiple-choice, short-answer and writing prompt/essay questions. The test is not timed. Only students who have qualified for the alternative assessment program can use calculators on the mathematics test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not eligible to take the HSGQE and therefore are not required to pass the exam to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The state began using the results from the first time a student takes the HSGQE to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002-03. The entire exam will be used, but since the exam currently has no science test, a different test may be used to fulfill the NCLB science testing requirement. The same cut scores and achievement levels will be used for NCLB proficiency as are used to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees grade the open-ended questions on the HSGQE. The achievement levels are advanced, proficient, below proficient, and far below proficient. The tests are scored on a scale of 100-600. Students must score 322 in reading, 275 in writing, and 328 in math to pass.

District and schools receive results for twelfth graders and those affected by pending graduation 21 days after the last day of testing via the Web. All other scores are reported six weeks after testing occurs. Students and parents receive results shortly after they are available to the district. Results from the spring administration are made available to the public each year. Reports include information about whether students pass or fail and their scores and subscores (skills and content) in each major subject area. Questions from the exam are not released every year.

The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have two opportunities each year to retake the exam, beginning with the next administration. The state reports that it does not collect information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the HSGQE. Students who receive a certificate of achievement because they did not pass all sections of the exam by their intended graduation date may retake the exam twice a year, indefinitely. However, the state does not collect information on pass rates for these students.

The state does not allow any alternate or substitute tests in place of the HSGQE. The state does permit transfer students who have passed another state's high school graduation exam in reading, English, and math to submit passing scores to meet graduation requirements in Alaska. Students must provide documentation that includes one of the following options:

- The out-of-state school from which the student transferred must transmit directly to the local school board an assessment report from the school where the student passed a secondary competency examination. The report must contain a summary of the student's assessment history in the school issuing the report.
- The out-of-state school from which the student transferred must transmit directly to the local school board student transcripts demonstrating the student passed a secondary competency examination. The transcript must show the subtests of the statewide secondary competency exit exam that the student has passed if an assessment report is not available.

In 2004, the state began to accept applications from students for waivers of the requirement to pass the exam to receive a high school diploma. Students may submit an application to their local school board requesting a waiver. To qualify for a diploma through this option, however, a student must

meet all other state and local district graduation requirements. The class of 2004 was the first required to pass the HSGQE, and the state released information stating that 2% of students are using this option.

Exemptions to passing the test are also available in special cases, such as for students who have moved to Alaska within two semesters of graduation, have had a parent die during the last semester of their graduating year, or have suffered a serious or sudden illness or physical injury.

If students do not meet all high school graduation requirements, including passing the exam, or are not granted a waiver from passing the exam, they can receive a certificate of achievement in lieu of a high school diploma. No alternate diplomas are available for general education students who do qualify for regular diplomas, nor are there any waiver or appeals processes in place.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows students with disabilities to use test accommodations based on the student's IEP or 504 plan. These may include, but are not limited to, extra assessment time, breaks during testing, test administration over several days, and individual or small-group administration. The state has developed exit exams and related materials in Braille and large print. These are the same accommodations allowed for students with disabilities for all statewide tests. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. No special diplomas or certificates are available for students with disabilities who do not receive a regular diploma, except for the certificate of achievement.

If a student with a disability does not pass the HSGQE as a high school sophomore, the IEP team can decide to provide the student with an alternative assessment program, which consists of the modified HSGQE or the non-standardized HSGQE. The IEP team must apply for and receive approval from the state department of education to use either alternative. The modified HSGQE is offered in the spring and fall and allows modifications that are not allowed with the regular HSGQE, such as using a spell check on a word processor, having the test read aloud, using a grammar check on a word processor, using a dictionary or thesaurus, or using math or writing resource guides. The non-standardized HSGQE is limited to students with severe physical or emotional disabilities who have taken the HSGQE and can document that they are unable to demonstrate their proficiency on a standardized assessment. This assessment requires a student to prepare an extensive collection of work that reflects competency in each of the state standards tested on the HSGQE. The work is then graded by a jury to ensure that the student has met those standards. (For more information, see <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/participation%20guidelines/participationguidelinesfinal.pdf>.) Upon completing either the modified or non-standardized HSGQE, a student is eligible to receive a regular diploma.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations including, but not limited to, extra assessment time, breaks during testing, test administration over several days, individual or small-group administration, use of translation glossaries, and oral administration of the exam or exam instructions in English or the native language. These are the same accommodations allowed for ELL students for all statewide tests. Alaska does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required in that all students must pass the English/language arts section of the exit exam in order to receive a diploma. Consequently, the state does not offer the exam in languages other than English, nor does it exempt ELL students from the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for just a short time. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma.

The state did not indicate that any alternate assessments, special diplomas, or certificates are available for ELLs who do not receive a regular diploma, other than the certificate of achievement available to all students.

Support Policies

The state does not require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the HSGQE, and students are not required to attend remediation programs. Alaska indicated that no state funds are targeted to remediation for students who fail the exam. The state also reports that it has not supported or established professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the exam. The state has developed information guides that explain the tests and provide examples of test items (available on the state website); the state views these as remediation materials to help students prepare for the exam. The state reports that it has not developed any diagnostic or formative assessments for use prior to the exit exam.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition
All Students	67%	70%	86%
Male	69%	67%	82%
Female	64%	74%	91%
White	76%	82%	92%
Black	45%	59%	76%
Hispanic	54%	61%	82%
Asian	67%	63%	86%
Native American	58%	69%	86%
Alaska Native	48%	44%	73%
English Language Learners/LEP	38%	29%	67%
Free or reduced-price lunch	47%	47%	74%
Students with disabilities	23%	22%	44%
Migrant	55%	47%	77%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The state does not calculate cumulative pass rates.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates shown below are calculated by dividing the number of graduates receiving a regular diploma before June 30 of a given year by the sum of:

- the number of graduates described above;
- the number of dropouts who were enrolled in grade 9 three school years earlier;
- the number of unduplicated dropouts who were enrolled in grade 10 two school years earlier;

- d) the number of unduplicated dropouts who were enrolled in grade 11 in the preceding school year;
- e) the number of unduplicated dropouts who were enrolled in grade 12 during the current year; and
- f) the number of grade 12 continuing students.

Graduation Rates for 2003-04

Subgroups	Rate
All students	63%
Male	60%
Female	66%
White	71%
Black	56%
Hispanic	52%
Asian	59%
American Indian	33%
Alaska Native	47%
English language learners/LEP	NA
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	46%

Higher Education

HSGQE scores are not used in making decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. The state reports that there have been no discussions between state K-12 education officials and higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

Arizona

Test Name: Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards

Subjects Tested: Reading, writing, and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official position of the Arizona Department of Education on the purpose of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) is laid out in the legislation authorizing the exit exam. Arizona Statute 15-701.01 asserts that the state board of education must (1) prescribe a minimum course of study, incorporating the academic standards adopted by the state board of education, for high school graduation; (2) prescribe competency requirements for high school graduation, incorporating the academic standards in at least the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies; and (3) develop and adopt competency tests for high school graduation in at least the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics and establish passing scores for each of these tests.

Historical and Policy Background

Arizona Statute 15-701.01, A 3, C authorizes the use of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards as a graduation test. The state began administering the exam in 1999 to students in grade 10. The exam was originally scheduled to take effect as a graduation requirement for the class of 2001, but the requirement to withhold diplomas from those not passing the test was postponed several times—first until 2002, and eventually until the class of 2006. AIMS is the state's first-ever exit exam, and there are no plans to replace it at this time.

Other changes to the exam include the introduction of new AIMS items in 2005 that are based on new standards adopted in 2003 for reading and math and new standards adopted in 2004 for Writing. Since the 2005 AIMS test was aligned to new content standards, the state undertook a process to set new a new scale for the test in May 2005. This process resulted in somewhat lower cut scores in all three content areas and higher pass rates in all three areas, as discussed in the section below on scoring and reporting. In addition, the legislature in May 2005 approved a plan targeted at helping many borderline students pass AIMS. The law gives extra points on AIMS to students who receive an A, B, or C in certain high school classes, but this credit only applies to students graduating in 2006 and 2007.

Test Characteristics

AIMS tests reading, writing, and math in grade 10. The reading and writing exams are administered in February; the math exam is administered in April; and the reading, writing, and math tests are administered in October.

The state considers AIMS to be a standards-based exam aligned to tenth grade standards, and an external review of the test is scheduled for later in 2005. New standards were adopted in 2003 for reading and math and in 2004 for writing. As of 2005, the AIMS test items are based on the new content standards. The state reports that the exam has undergone review by state and external reviewers to determine whether it is aligned to state standards. AIMS was developed collaboratively by Arizona and a testing company.

The test consists of multiple-choice and writing prompt/essay questions. All sections of the exam are untimed. Students are not allowed to use calculators on any part of the exam.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass AIMS to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The state began using the first administration of AIMS to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001-02. The entire exam is used, and the same cut scores and achievement levels will be used for NCLB proficiency as are used to award high school diplomas. The science portion of the AIMS exam is currently in development, and is scheduled for field-testing in spring 2007 and operational testing in 2008. The science AIMS exam is not currently expected to be an exit exam.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the AIMS. The achievement levels are exceeds the standard, meets the standard, approaches the standard, and falls below the standard. The tests are scored on a new scale of 500–900, and as a result of the 2005 changes in achievement levels, students must score 674 on reading, 678 on writing, and 683 on mathematics to pass (compared with the previous minimum score of 500 in each subject on a scale of 200-800). The writing score is based on a single writing prompt scored using a six-trait writing rubric.

District and schools receive results 30 calendar days after tests are received by the testing company. Districts decide when to report scores to students and parents. Results are released to the public annually. Reports indicate whether students passed or failed and include scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area.

The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have four opportunities before the end of grade 12 to retake the exit exam. The first time they can retake the exam is fall of grade 11. The state will collect information on the number of times students take each section of the high school exit examination, but has not done so yet, since only three of the planned five test administrations have occurred for the students graduating in 2006. As mentioned earlier, in May 2005, legislation was passed that will allow students graduating in 2006 or 2007 to apply high school grades in certain classes towards their AIMS scores. If students have not met the exit exam requirements but have met other graduation requirements, they are allowed to continue to retake the exam an unlimited number of times after twelfth grade. The state does not have information on pass rates for these students, since the class of 2006 will be the first to have to pass AIMS to graduate.

New legislation excuses a student from passing AIMS for graduation if that student has passed another state's assessment with academic standards substantially equivalent to Arizona's. The state does not allow general education students who fail the AIMS to earn a regular diploma by passing a substitute exam. There is also no process in place for students to request a waiver or appeal the exit exam requirement. There are currently no alternate diplomas or certificates available for students who do not pass the exit exam.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows students with disabilities to use accommodations while testing. Standard accommodations include, but are not limited to, extended time, scheduled rest breaks, individual or small group administration, special settings, reading or signing of directions and test items to students,

magnification or low vision aids for visually impaired students, and scribes. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. In addition, the state has developed exit exams and related materials in Braille and large print. The list of standard and nonstandard accommodations will be revised for 2005-06. Currently, students who pass the exit exam using accommodations will still receive a regular high school diploma.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities who do not pass the exit exam can receive a regular diploma if they meet all other requirements. In February 2005, the state's attorney general waived the exit exam requirement for special education students. On a statewide level, there are currently no alternate routes, exclusions, or substitute tests for students with disabilities to allow them to receive a regular high school diploma if they do not pass the exit exam. However, local school governing boards determine the graduation requirements for students with IEPs.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations while testing. These include, but are not limited to, use of a translation dictionary, extended time, scheduled rest breaks; individual or small group administration, special settings, reading or signing of directions and test items to students, magnification or low vision aids for visually impaired students, and scribes. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. The list of standard and non-standard accommodations will be revised for 2005-06. Currently, students who pass the exit exam using accommodations will still receive a regular high school diploma. For English language learners, there are currently no special waivers, alternate routes, exclusions, or substitute tests to allow them to receive a regular high school diploma if they do not pass the exit exam. Nor does Arizona have any special program or assistance targeted to ELL students to help them pass the exit exam.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for just a short time. Arizona does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the exit exam in English to receive a diploma. The state is prohibited by law from offering the AIMS in languages other than English.

Support Policies

When students fail an exit exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information, such as future test dates, to help them prepare for future administration of the exam. The state does not require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass AIMS, nor does it require students to attend remediation programs if they fail the exam. However, in 2004-05, a \$10 million fund was established by the state department of education to provide eleventh and twelfth grade students who had not yet passed the AIMS test with one-on-one tutoring. Funds were distributed to districts through an application process, yet the districts used less than \$1 million of these funds. The state did not indicate whether it supported professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the exam. For students, the state has developed computer-based programs, study guides, and website resources, and has publicly released test items. The state reports that it is currently developing a formative assessment for the exit exam.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability, the state has an accountability system called Arizona Learns in which student pass rates on the AIMS are a factor in determining a school's performance level. The system rewards schools for moving from one level to the next and targets additional oversight on schools in the lowest performance category.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First Time Test Takers – Students in Grade 10 in Spring 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition
All students	39%	59%	62%
Male	40%	56%	56%
Female	38%	61%	68%
White	53%	76%	73%
Black	23%	49%	58%
Hispanic	20%	37%	47%
Asian	64%	72%	77%
Native American	17%	31%	43%
English language learners/LEP	10%	12%	23%
Free or reduced price lunch	21%	37%	45%
Students with disabilities	6%	17%	20%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Statewide data are not yet available, since the class of 2006 is the first required to pass AIMS to graduate.

Graduation Rates

Arizona calculates four- and five-year graduation rates. This table below shows the four-year graduation rate, which is the proportion of the cohort class of 2003 that received a high school diploma by their fourth year spring commencement in 2003. The cohort class is comprised of the cohort's original ninth grade enrollment plus students who transferred in, minus students who transferred out and any deceased students.

Graduation Rates for the Class of 2003

All students	74.0%
Male	70.1%
Female	78.1%
White	81.9%
Black	66.5%
Hispanic	63.1%
Asian	88.7%
American Indian	58.5%
English language learners/LEP	N/A
Free or reduced price lunch	N/A
Students with disabilities	N/A

Higher Education

AIMS scores are not used in making decisions about undergraduate admissions or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. But in April 2004, the Arizona Board of Regents voted to link students' AIMS scores, in addition to other achievement measures, to full scholarships to state universities. Students who achieve at the highest performance level, exceeds the standard, on all three content areas of AIMS may receive a tuition waiver at three state universities if they also meet other waiver criteria. The state education department reports that it has not had conversations with higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

California

Test Name: California High School Exit Examination
Subjects Tested: English language arts and mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10
Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The purpose of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) is to significantly improve pupil achievement in public high schools and to ensure that pupils who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The CAHSEE helps to identify students who are not demonstrating grade-level competency and encourages districts to give these students the attention and resources needed to help them acquire the necessary skills during their high school years. Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, no student will receive a public high school diploma without having passed the CAHSEE and met the district's requirements for graduation.

Historical and Policy Background

The California High School Exit Examination, a standards-based exam, is the state's first exit exam. The exam was authorized in 1999 by Senate Bill 2X. The exam was part of a state effort to raise standards for high school graduation after the legislature had determined that local proficiency standards established under prior state law were generally set below the high school level and were not consistent with the state's academic content standards. According to Senate Bill 2X, the CAHSEE was to be developed in accordance with content standards in language arts and mathematics adopted by the California State Board of Education. The CAHSEE was developed based on recommendations of the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel, whose members were appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction and approved by the state board.

The CAHSEE was offered for the first time in spring 2001 (March and May) to volunteer ninth graders (class of 2004). In October 2001, Assembly Bill 1609 removed the option for ninth graders to take the CAHSEE, beginning with the 2002 administration. The CAHSEE was next administered in spring 2002 to all tenth graders who had not passed it during the spring 2001 administration. It was then administered several times to the remaining students in the class of 2004 who had not yet passed one or both parts (English language arts and mathematics). The class of 2005 took the CAHSEE for the first time in spring 2003.

In July 2003, the state board of education approved a delay in the graduation consequences of the CAHSEE from school year 2003-04 to school year 2005-06. This action was based in part on findings of an independent study that had focused on the test development process and the implementation of standards-based instruction in California public schools. In July 2003, the state board also decided to reduce the testing time for the CAHSEE from three days to two. To make this change, the test developers revised the format, but not the content, of the English language arts (ELA) portion of the CAHSEE, reducing the number of essays from two to one and the number of multiple-choice questions from 82 to 72. The mathematics blueprint was revised slightly to replace questions with less frequently encountered data displays, such as stem-and-leaf and box-and-whisker plots, with questions with more common displays, such as bar charts and line graphs. The language complexity for mathematics questions was also reduced.

Education Code Section 60852.5 (Senate Bill 964) required a study to examine alternatives to the CAHSEE for students with disabilities. The final report with recommendations from this study was delivered May 2, 2005, although it is not clear whether any changes will evolve from the study.

The state has no plans to replace the CAHSEE at this time.

Test Characteristics

Students in the class of 2006 took the CAHSEE for the first time as tenth graders in February, March, or May 2004. Those students who did not pass both the mathematics and ELA portions of the exam as tenth graders could take the test two times as eleventh graders in the 2004-05 school year and will have up to three opportunities to pass the exam as twelfth graders in the 2005-06 school year.

The CAHSEE first-time (“census”) administration for all grade 10 students occurs in either February or March. School districts may choose either March or May for makeup testing for grade 10 students. School districts may retest grade 11 and 12 students who did not previously pass one or both parts in either September or November and in February, March, or May.

The CAHSEE has two parts: English language arts and mathematics. The ELA part addresses state content standards through grade 10. In reading, the exam assesses vocabulary, decoding, comprehension, and analysis of information and literary texts. In writing, it covers writing strategies, applications, and the conventions of English, such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The mathematics part of the CAHSEE addresses state standards in grades 6 and 7 and in algebra I. The exam includes statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra. Students are asked to demonstrate a strong foundation in computation and arithmetic, including working with decimals, fractions, and percentages.

The CAHSEE has undergone external and internal reviews to determine whether it is aligned to state standards, as well as an external review by an independent evaluator to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exam. In addition, the law requires an independent evaluation that must include analyses of (1) pupil performance, broken down by grade level, gender, race or ethnicity, and portion of the exam, including trends over time; (2) the exam’s effects on college attendance, pupil retention, graduation, and dropout rates, including an analysis of these effects on subgroups of students; and (3) whether the exam has or is likely to have differential effects, either beneficial or detrimental, on subgroups of students. (Box 7 describes HumRRO’s findings on dropout rates and exit exams). The evaluation reports also must include recommendations to improve the quality, fairness, validity, and reliability of the CAHSEE. The first report of the independent evaluation was completed and presented to the state department of education, state board, legislature, governor, and other control agencies on July 1, 2000. Subsequent evaluation reports are due to these same parties by February 1 of every even-numbered year.

California contracts with a test publisher to develop items and administer the CAHSEE. All items and test forms are reviewed by the California Department of Education before they are used on the exam.

The test consists of multiple-choice questions and a writing prompt/essay question. The CAHSEE is an untimed test, administered over two days. Each section (ELA and math) must be completed during the school day unless the student has an individualized education program that specifies the need for additional testing time beyond the school day as an accommodation. State officials anticipate that most students can complete the ELA test in three and one-half hours on the first test day and the mathematics test in three hours on the second test day.

Students in private schools are not eligible to take the CAHSEE, and the exam is not a graduation requirement for students receiving a diploma from a private school. Home-schooled students are not required to pass the CAHSEE to receive diplomas, except for a small number of home-schooled students who are earning a public high school diploma.

NCLB

The state plans to use the results from the first time a student takes the CAHSEE in the tenth grade to meet the high school assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The state began using the exam for this purpose in 2002-03. Beginning with the February 2004 test administration, the definition of proficient performance for NCLB purposes was set at a 380 scaled score for both ELA and math—higher than the exit exam passing score of 350 for each part.

Scoring and Reporting

Scorers with at least a bachelor's degree retained by the testing contractor grade the open-ended questions on the CAHSEE. Teachers are encouraged to serve as scorers. The tests are scored on a scale of 275 to 450, and students need a 350 on each exam in order to pass. For ELA, a 350 scale score represents 60% of the items correct, and for mathematics it represents 55% of items correct. Districts can access the results online within 10 weeks of a test administration. Student and parent reports are mailed to the district to distribute locally within 10 weeks of test administration. Aggregate results at the school, district, county, and state levels are reported to the public annually via the Internet. Reports include information on whether students pass or fail and their scores and subscores for each major subject area.

The state does not collect information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the exam, though it is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

State law requires the CAHSEE to be administered only on the dates designated by the state superintendent of public instruction. Students take the CAHSEE for the first time as tenth graders, and those who do not pass one or both parts in tenth grader can take the test two times as eleventh graders. In addition, students will have up to three opportunities to pass the exam as twelfth graders. Thus, students who do not pass the CAHSEE in the second semester of tenth grade have up to five additional opportunities to pass the exam. Students may retake the examination until they pass the ELA and mathematics parts, but they may retake only those parts not previously passed.

If students have not met the exit exam requirement but have met the state's other graduation requirements, they may retake the high school exit exam once after twelfth grade and still receive a diploma. The state does not permit students to transfer passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet the graduation requirements for the CAHSEE, nor does it allow students to substitute any other tests in place of the CAHSEE. There is no waiver or appeals process for general education students who fail the exit exam. There are no alternate diplomas or certificates available from the state for general education students who do not receive a regular diploma.

California offers adult education programs and the GED. Adult education also has secondary/high school programs that offer courses to pursue a high school diploma. Students are allowed to take the CAHSEE as part of an adult education program and have up to two opportunities each school year to do so. Initial pass rates for these students from the 2003-04 school year were 44% for math and 51% for ELA.

California also has a California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE). The CHSPE is aligned with the state's academic content standards (grades 7-8 math and grades 10-11 ELA). Students who pass the

CHSPE receive an equivalency certificate. The certificate plus parent permission allows them to leave high school early. Students must be 16 to take this exam, which is considered equivalent to a high school diploma.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

As stated in the California Code of Regulations Title 5, students must be allowed to take the CAHSEE with the test variations specified in their IEP or Section 504 plan for standardized testing, CAHSEE testing, or classroom instruction and assessment. The state distinguishes between two types of variations in the assessment environment or process: accommodations, which do not fundamentally alter what the test measures, and modifications, which do fundamentally alter what the test measures or affect the comparability of scores. Examples of modifications include using a calculator, having the ELA part of the exam read aloud, or using an audio CD to take the ELA exam (although using an audio CD for the math exam is considered an accommodation).

Students who take the test with accommodations and achieve a passing score receive a regular diploma if they also complete all other graduation requirements. A detailed list of variations, accommodations, and modifications is available on the state department of education website (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/matrix5.pdf>), and variations for CAHSEE differ slightly from those allowed on other statewide tests. The state does have large print versions and Braille transcriptions developed by the test contractor, and these are considered accommodations.

For a student who takes one or both portions of the test with a modification and obtains a score of 350 or higher, the score report will be marked “not valid” for the applicable portion of the test because use of a modification changes what the test is measuring and affects the comparability of test scores. The student is then eligible for a waiver from the local school board and can receive a regular diploma if all other graduation requirements are met.

Since the exam was authorized, a waiver process has existed for students with disabilities. Initially, the waiver process was administered by the state board of education, but Senate Bill 1476 (Ch. 808, September 2002), effective January 1, 2003, shifted responsibility for the waiver process to the local school district governing board. To be eligible for this waiver, a student must have an IEP or Section 504 plan in place “that requires the accommodations or modifications to be provided to the pupil when taking the high school exit examination.” At the request of the student’s parent, the school principal must submit a request to waive the requirement to successfully pass one or both parts of the CAHSEE to the local school district governing board if the student has taken the CAHSEE with a modification and received the equivalent of a passing score. If the waiver is granted, and all other graduation requirements have been met, then the student is eligible to receive a high school diploma.

Education Code section 56390 allows local school districts to give students with disabilities who are not on a diploma track a certificate of completion. This is not equivalent to a high school diploma.

English Language Learners

The state allows test variations for English language learners if the variations are regularly used in the classroom, according to the California Code of Regulations Title 5. A test variation is defined as a change in the manner in which a test is presented or administered or in how a test taker is allowed to respond and includes, but is not limited to, accommodations and modifications. Variations for ELLs include the following:

- Having the test directions printed in the test administration manual translated orally into the student’s primary language and asking clarifying questions about the test directions in the primary language

- Taking additional supervised breaks during the testing day or after each section within a test part provided that the test section is completed in one testing day. A test section is identified by a "STOP" at the end of it
- Taking the test in a separate group with other ELLs, as long as the student is directly supervised by a school employee who has signed the test security affidavit and the student has been provided with such a flexible setting as part of his or her regular instruction or assessment
- Having access to translation glossaries and word lists (English to primary language) that do not include definitions or formulas.

These accommodations differ slightly from those allowed on other statewide tests, as explained on the state department of education website (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/matrix5.pdf>).

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled for just a short time in U.S. schools. The state does not offer the CAHSEE in languages other than English because the law requires students to take and pass the CAHSEE in English to receive a high school diploma.

Students who take the test with test variations, except for modifications, and achieve a passing score receive a regular diploma if they also complete all other graduation requirements. There are no special alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests to allow ELLs to obtain a regular high school diploma, other than the options available to all students. There are no special certificates for ELLs who do not pass the high school exit exam. Also, California has no special program or assistance targeted to ELL students to help them pass the exit exam.

Support Policies

California requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the CAHSEE, although students are not required to attend remediation sessions. School districts are supposed to use regularly available state resources and any available supplemental remedial resources to prepare students to succeed on the exit exam. In the 2004-05 school year, the state committed \$157,438,000 to remediation for students who fail state exams (including the exit exams) for grades 7-12; these funds are distributed on a per pupil basis.

Professional development efforts have focused on helping teachers learn about the state's academic content standards and familiarizing teachers with the format and types of questions on the CAHSEE. The state provided school districts with a remediation planning guide in 2002; teacher guides on the CAHSEE in 2002, 2003, and 2004; and student study guides in 2003, 2004, and 2005. The state also released test questions in 2001, 2002, twice in 2004, and 2005. School districts and county offices of education may use these resources to prepare staff development for their teachers.

Some of the questions from the CAHSEE are released each year. The cumulative set of released test questions is available on the state department of education Web site. Student study guides produced by the state use released test questions in practice tests and to explain the academic content standards.

Monitoring

The CAHSEE is one part of the state accountability system, called the Academic Performance Index (API). If a school meets API criteria for test participation and achievement growth, it may be eligible to receive monetary awards, although no award money was budgeted in 2003-04 or 2004-05. If a school is ranked in the bottom half of the statewide distribution of performance and does not meet or exceed its growth targets, it may be identified for interventions. An independent evaluator hired by the state is responsible for looking at the impact of the CAHSEE.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers, 2003-04 School Year

Subgroups	Math	Reading/Language Arts
All students	74%	75%
Male	73%	70%
Female	74%	79%
White	87%	88%
Black	54%	63%
Hispanic	61%	62%
Asian	91%	85%
Native American	69%	73%
English language learners/LEP	49%	39%
Economically disadvantaged*	61%	60%
Students with disabilities	30%	30%
Adult education	44%	51%

*California considers a student to be economically disadvantaged if (1) the student participates in the National School Lunch Program, or (2) the education level of the student's most educated parent or guardian is less than high school.

Cumulative Pass Rates

Data on cumulative pass rates are not available at the state level.

Graduation Rates

Graduation rate data are not available at the state level.

Higher Education

Public universities and community colleges in California do not use the CAHSEE to make decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement. Students can be admitted to the state's public community colleges without a high school diploma. It is also possible for students who do not have a diploma to be admitted to a public university through a "special action admissions process." The University of California has established a path to eligibility called Eligibility in the Local Context, which deems students as eligible to attend the university if they place in the top 4% of their class. There have been no discussions between state K-12 education and higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

California has developed the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, a statewide series of end-of-course exams in math, English language arts, science, history, and social science. The results of these tests are used for student and school accountability purposes. The state does not administer any additional college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

Florida

Test Name: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

Subjects Tested: Reading and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official purpose of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is to assess student achievement of the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks in reading, mathematics, science, and writing. The FCAT also includes norm-referenced tests in reading comprehension and mathematics problem solving, which allow the performance of Florida students to be compared with that of students across the nation.

Historical and Policy Background

Florida Statute 1008.22(3)(c) and State Board Rule 6A-1.09422 authorize the use of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The state first administered the exam in 1998. Students enrolled in grade 9 in the fall of 1999 were the first group of students required to pass the FCAT in reading and mathematics to receive a standard diploma. Diplomas were first withheld from students who did not pass the FCAT reading and mathematics tests in 2003.

Before the FCAT, the state administered the High School Competency Test, which was a minimum competency test. The Educational Accountability Act of 1976 outlined a system for defining and measuring the attainment of educational objectives and competencies in basic communications and mathematics functions. The 1990 Legislature reaffirmed the importance of establishing minimum student performance skills for high school graduation.

Policies have changed over the course of implementation to allow some accommodations for students taking the FCAT, to exempt some students with disabilities from the exam requirement and allow them to demonstrate competency through other methods, and to award certificates of completion instead of diplomas to those who do not meet the exit exam requirement. In addition, the state board of education in May 2005 made permanent the temporary legislative policy to allow students to substitute scores on the ACT and SAT for passing the FCAT. There are no plans to replace the FCAT at this time.

Test Characteristics

The FCAT exams are administered in October, March, and June, and students take the test for the first time in spring of grade 10. The state considers the FCAT to be a standards-based exam aligned to grade 10 standards. The exam was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing contractor.

Although grade 10 students participate in reading, mathematics, science, and writing tests, only math and reading are used to meet the graduation requirement for a standard diploma. The tests consist of multiple-choice, gridded-response, short-answer and extended-response items. Students who retake the exam take a different version that consists of multiple-choice and gridded-response items only. Teachers participate in item reviews to produce an internal working document, and FCAT has undergone review by external reviewers to determine whether it is aligned to state standards. The grade 10 reading and math tests last 160 minutes each. The grade 10 retake tests are untimed. All grade 10 students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the FCAT to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The state reported that it is using the results from all tenth graders who take the test for the first time to meet the NCLB requirements. The NCLB proficiency requirement is achievement level 3 (there are five achievement levels), and the entire exam is used for NCLB purposes. The FCAT passing scores for the graduation requirement are lower (in the mid-range of the level 2 or “basic” score) than those used for NCLB purposes and apply only to the reading and mathematics tests.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing contractor employees with college degrees score the open-ended questions on the FCAT. The achievement levels range from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. The tests are scored on a scale of 100-500. In 2003-04, the passing scores were 1926 (scaled score of 300) for the reading test and 1889 (scaled score of 300) for the mathematics test, unless the student had previously qualified for the passing scores required for the 2002-03 graduating class. The passing scores are in the mid-range of the state’s level 2 achievement standard, according to the state’s consolidated NCLB plan. Level 2 for reading is between 287 and 326 and for mathematics is between 287 and 314.

Districts, schools, students, parents, and the public receive results approximately eight weeks after testing occurs. The public can view district and school-level results after every test administration. Individual student reports include information about whether students pass or fail and their scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area. At least one open-ended question, along with accompanying student responses, is released every year to schools, teachers, and students and is sent home to parents.

The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data. If students fail an exit exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.

Student Options

Students have up to six opportunities by the end of grade 12 to retake the exam. Students can begin to retake the exam in October of grade 11. The state reports that it has not completed an analysis of the number of attempts students make to pass each section of the FCAT. Those who have not met the exit exam requirements but have met other graduation requirements are allowed to retake the FCAT after the twelfth grade and still receive a diploma. There are currently no limits on the number of times a student can retake the exam or age limit for taking the exam. The state does collect information on pass rates for these students, but it is not presently available. A special study to perform a longitudinal review of the data will have to be conducted.

The state does not permit transfer students who have passed another state’s high school exit exam to submit these scores to meet Florida’s graduation requirements. In 2004, the Florida legislature passed House Bill 23B, which provided additional opportunities and alternatives (such as substituting the ACT or SAT) for students to meet certain high school graduation requirements. At the state board meeting on May 17, 2005, the ACT and SAT were adopted as permanent alternatives to the FCAT for earning a diploma.

The Florida Department of Education conducted concordance studies to determine the score relationship between the FCAT and the SAT and ACT. The studies were based on Florida students who took the FCAT in the spring of 2000 and 2001 and had also taken one of the two standardized national tests. Twelfth grade students who were scheduled to graduate in 2004 and who attained the SAT or ACT scores shown below are deemed to have satisfied the testing requirement for a Florida high school diploma.

Substitute Scores for Receiving a Florida Diploma

Reading		Mathematics	
FCAT	300	FCAT	300
SAT	410	SAT	370
ACT	15	ACT	15

Students must have taken the FCAT three times without earning a passing score in order to use the equivalent scores for the SAT and ACT. In 2003-04, less than 1% of students used alternate assessments in lieu of the FCAT for graduation purposes.

The state does not have a process for students to request a waiver or appeal of the exit exam. Students can, however, receive a certificate of completion if they do not receive a regular diploma.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Florida allows students with disabilities to use testing accommodations, including but not limited to accommodations in presentation (such as signing or orally presenting all directions and items other than reading items); in modes of response (such as dictating responses to a proctor or using a computer or alternative keyboard to indicate answers); in test schedule (such as taking frequent breaks or allowing students additional time); and in setting (such as taking the test individually or in a small group or using adaptive or special furniture). Students can also use assistive devices, such as visual magnification and auditory amplification. In addition, the state has developed exams and related materials in Braille and large print. These same accommodations are allowed in other statewide testing programs. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a standard high school diploma.

The Enhanced New Needed Opportunity for Better Life and Education for Students with Disabilities (ENNOBLES) Act, passed by the state legislature in 2003, requires each district school board to provide instruction to prepare students with disabilities to demonstrate proficiency in the skills and competencies necessary for successful grade-to-grade progression and high school graduation. The ENNOBLES Act also permits the FCAT graduation requirement to be waived for certain students with disabilities who do not have a passing score on the exam but have met all other requirements to graduate with a standard diploma. (These requirements include an active individualized education program, a 2.0 grade point average, the 24 credit hours required for a standard diploma, and demonstrated mastery of the grade 10 Sunshine State Standards.) These students should be provided with multiple opportunities to take the test, along with intensive remediation in the areas of need. Before the FCAT graduation requirement can be waived, the student's IEP team must meet during the student's senior year to determine whether the FCAT can accurately measure the student's abilities, taking into consideration allowable accommodations. Students who receive an ENNOBLES waiver may graduate with a standard diploma if they have also met the district requirements for graduation.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations while testing, including flexible setting, flexible timing, use of a translation dictionary, and assistance in the heritage or native language, such as limited assistance by an ESOL or heritage teacher using the student's heritage language. These same accommodations are allowed in other statewide testing programs. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. ELLs who do not receive a regular high school diploma can use the same options available for general education students.

The state exempts students from taking the FCAT if they have been classified as limited English proficient within one year of the assessment date. Florida does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English language arts section of the exit exam to receive a diploma. Consequently, the state does not offer the FCAT in languages other than English. Florida has no special program or assistance specifically targeted on helping ELLs pass the exit exam. Florida offers continuous support for all ELL students by providing them with ESOL-certified teachers until they have mastered English and been successful on all the state's graduation requirements.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remedial services to students who do not pass the FCAT, and these students are required to attend remediation programs. In the 2005-06 school year, the state committed \$670,341,490 to remediation for students who fail state exams, including the exit exams, for grades K-12; these funds are distributed on a per pupil basis. The state has developed specific professional development programs and materials to help teachers administer and prepare students for the FCAT. A few of Florida's recently developed preparation and remediation programs include the following:

- FCAT Explorer, a Web site that helps students learn about and practice the skills tested on the FCAT
- Just Read, Florida!, which provides teachers and parents with the latest information on reading research
- Continuous Improvement Model, which provides explicit, focused, and scheduled instruction on the tested state benchmarks, including intensive instruction in benchmarks that an individual student finds difficult

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability, pass rate data are one of the factors used to determine school "grades" in the state's A+ accountability system. Schools are rewarded with recognition dollars of \$100 per student if the school moves up a grade or receives an A.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/Language Arts
All students	76%	54%
Male	78%	52%
Female	75%	56%
White	86%	66%
Black	55%	32%
Hispanic	70%	43%
Asian	90%	66%
Native American	81%	59%
English language learners/LEP	48%	13%
Free or reduced-price lunch	64%	38%
Students with disabilities	39%	18%
Multiracial	80%	61%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Data on cumulative pass rates are not available at the state level, as the resources to complete the matching of student test and enrollment records have not been available.

Graduation Rates

Florida's graduation rates are shown in the table below. These rates represent the percentage of students who graduated within four years of their initial enrollment in ninth grade. Incoming transfer students are included in the appropriate cohort based on their grade level and year of entry. Deceased students and students who withdraw to attend school in another system (including those who withdraw to attend another private or public school, an authorized home education program, or an adult education program) are removed from the cohort. Each student in the resulting adjusted cohort receives a final classification as a graduate, dropout, or nongraduate. ("Nongraduates" include certificate recipients and retained students who remained enrolled.) The adjusted cohort includes graduates, nongraduates, and dropouts. The graduation rate equals the number of graduates from the adjusted cohort divided by the total number of students in the adjusted cohort. Only those students from the adjusted cohort who graduated in the expected year are included in the calculation—in other words, students from a cohort who took longer than four years to graduate are not included.

Graduation Rates for 2003-04

Subgroups	Rate
All students	72%*
Male	68%
Female	75%
White	80%
Black	57%
Hispanic	64%
Asian	82%
Native American	73%
Multiracial	78%
English language learners/LEP	47%
Free or reduced-price lunch	53%
Students with disabilities	64%
Migrant	46%

* Includes special diploma and GED recipients

Higher Education

In the Center's 2003 report, higher education institutions in Florida reported that the FCAT is not used for admissions, scholarship, or course placement decisions. Students can be admitted to limited nondegree programs and GED preparation courses in community colleges if they do not receive a diploma as a result of not passing the FCAT.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

Georgia

Test Name: Georgia High School Graduation Tests

Subjects Tested: English language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science

Initial Grade Tested: 11

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The state indicated that it has an official position on the purpose of the exit exam. The Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGTs) were designed to certify Georgia high school students for graduation. The tests are grounded in the state's Quality Core Curriculum. They are intended to ensure that students have mastered the content necessary to succeed in postsecondary education or become productive members of an increasingly mercurial and competitive job market.

Historical and Policy Background

In 1991, the state legislature passed Georgia law O.C.G.A. section 20-1-281, which requires curriculum-based assessments to be administered in grade 11 for graduation purposes. The first operational administration of the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) affected the class of 1994. The exams were phased in gradually, beginning in 1991. Students who entered ninth grade in 1991 were required to pass tests in writing, English language arts, and math, with new tests added in later years. In spring 1996, a graduation requirement to pass the social studies test was added, and in spring 1997, a graduation requirement to pass the science exam was added.

The spring 2004 tests for English language arts and mathematics included additional items of greater difficulty. As explained below, the state made this change to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act.

Before the GHSGT, the state administered the Georgia Basic Skills Test. The curriculum changed after 1991 and to ensure that the assessments were fair and test what students learned, this test continued to be administered to students who were enrolled in ninth grade prior to 1991. Students are required to complete GHSGT test in effect at the time of their graduation. The state supports the goal of obtaining a diploma regardless of how long it takes.

Pending a state board of education recommendation, the state is exploring using another exam, the End-of-Course Tests that were first administered in fall 2003, as a possible replacement for the GHSGT. The 2000 A+ Reform Act passed by the Georgia legislature provides for this change on a timeline to be determined by the state board. In addition, Georgia is introducing new curricula, the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), in all grades. These standards are being phased in by content area. Starting in spring 2008, the GHSGTs in language arts and science will reflect the new curricular standards, and new performance standards will also be set. In 2010 and 2011, the social studies and mathematics tests, respectively, will be revised to reflect new curricula standards.

Test Characteristics

The content area exams are administered for first time to eleventh graders in March and April, and the writing exam is administered in September. The state considers the Georgia High School Graduation Tests to be a standards-based exam system that is aligned to eleventh grade state standards. The standards were set by Georgia educators and education professionals based on judgments of adequate education for high school students in the four content areas tested: math, English language arts, science, and social studies. The tests were developed by a testing company specifically for the

state. The exit tests were reviewed by external reviewers to assess alignment to state standards. The state reports that it has conducted a study to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exams.

The Georgia exit exams currently assess English language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The tests consist of multiple-choice and writing prompt/essay questions. Each content exam is 180 minutes in length, except for the writing test, which is 90 minutes long. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

Private school and home-schooled students are not required to pass the exit exam to receive diplomas.

NCLB

Georgia began using the results from the first time a student takes the graduation test to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2003-04. The science test will also be used to meet NCLB requirements beginning in 2007-08. Only a subset of questions on the graduation exam is being used for NCLB purposes, however. The spring 2004 tests for English language arts and mathematics include additional test items of greater difficulty. The state made this change to comply with NCLB. During peer review, it was noted that the pass rate for Georgia was exceptionally high and did not fit the NCLB requirement for exams based on rigorous academic content. The additional, enhanced items will be used to calculate adequate yearly progress for NCLB and will not affect the individual student's chances of passing the test for diploma purposes. The state plans to use different cut scores for NCLB proficiency than are used to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

The performance levels for the graduation exam are pass plus, pass, and fail. The tests are scored on a scale of 400-600, and students must achieve a scaled score of 500 in each subject area tested. Scores are reported to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public one month after testing occurs. Scores are publicly reported once a year. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed and showing their scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area. The questions from the exit exams are not released. Georgia is currently developing a system of student identifiers that will be used to track individual student achievement over time.

Student Options

Students have five opportunities to retake the exam before the end of grade 12. Students can retake the content area tests in July, September, and November and can retake the writing test in March and July. If students have not passed the exit exam but have met other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam as many times as they need to after twelfth grade to receive a diploma. The state does not collect pass rate data on these students.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other state exams to meet graduation requirements in Georgia. The state does not allow students to earn a regular high school diploma by passing a substitute test. The state does have a waiver process, which is initiated by the student's home school with a recommendation from the school system's superintendent. Students submit a waiver packet containing documentation of reasons for the waiver. The waiver is reviewed by a committee and submitted to the state board of education for a decision. All students are eligible for the waiver, but receiving a passing vote from the board typically requires documentation of a limitation that would account for failing the test. If all other graduation requirements are met but the exit exam, students can receive a certificate of attendance.

Student Outcomes

Percentage of Students Passing on Retests by Content Area 2005

	Language Arts	Math	Social Studies	Science
All retest students	37%	31%	24%	14%
Second attempt	48%	41%	29%	19%
Third attempt	33%	32%	25%	14%
Fourth or more attempt	33%	28%	23%	13%

Graduation Rates for 2004

All students	65.4%
Male	61.6%
Female	69.4%
White	71.8%
Black	56.8%
Hispanic	49.6%
Asian	76.6%
Native American	63.0%
English language learners/LEP	40.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch	56.0%
Students with disabilities	28.6%

The graduation rate calculation is a proxy calculation; in other words, the lack of unique statewide student identifiers does not allow for tracking of individual students across the four high school years. The graduation rate reflects the percentage of students who entered ninth grade in a given year and were in the graduating class four years later. The 2003-2004 K-12 Report Card provides the 2002, 2003, and the 2004 graduation rates. A brief description of how the graduation rate for 2004 is calculated follows:

1. Sum the 9th-grade dropouts in 2000-2001, the 10th-grade dropouts in 2001-2002, the 11th-grade dropouts in 2002-2003 and the 12th-grade dropouts in 2003-2004 for a four-year total of dropouts.
2. Divide the number of students receiving regular diplomas by the four-year total of dropouts plus the sum of students receiving Special Education Diplomas plus the number of students receiving Certificates of Attendance plus the number of students receiving regular diplomas. The number of students displayed on the graphs represents an approximation to the students in the ninth-grade in 2002-2001 that should have graduated in 2004 and is the denominator in this step.
3. Change the result in step 2 from a decimal to a percentage (example: 0.83 equals 83%) The same process was followed for the 2002 rate except the years begin with 1998-1999 through 2001-2002 academic years and for the 2003 rate, the years begin with 1999-2000 through 2002-2003 academic years.

Special Populations

Students with disabilities who have a specific accommodation documented in their IEP or section 504 plan may take the state tests with accommodations if the accommodation is used in the student's regular education program. Similarly, English language learners who have a specific accommodation documented in their limited English proficient/testing participation plan may take the state tests with accommodations, if the accommodation is used in the student's regular education program. Students

with disabilities and English language learners who pass the exit exam using standard accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. In addition, some test-related materials are available in Braille and large print.

All students must pass the GHSGT under standard administration conditions to be eligible for a regular diploma. However, a special education diploma is available for students with disabilities who do not receive a regular diploma.

English language learners who are pursuing a regular diploma must take a standard administration of the GHSGT. ELL students who are also in a special education program and are pursuing a special education diploma are eligible for a nonstandard administration of the GHSGT. Students who take a nonstandard administration of the GHSGT are not eligible for a regular diploma. ELL students are not exempt from taking the exit exam because they lack proficiency in English or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for a short time. The state does not offer the exam in any languages other than English. Although Georgia does not have an official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language, competency is required, in that students must pass the English language arts section of the exam. No special assistance is provided solely to ELL students to pass the exam, but these students are able to the support policies noted below.

Support Policies

The state does not require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the GHSGT, nor are students required to attend remedial classes if they do not pass the exam. If students fail the exams, all school districts offer some form of remediation for students in need, such as optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and information about implications for course taking. Low performance on the GHSGT may have implications for the curriculum track that students are advised to pursue. High performance in remedial classes may clear students to take more rigorous courses. The state does not target any state funds on remediation for students who fail the exam, although other state and federal money can be used to fund these programs.

The state has not supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the state high school exit exams. The state has developed curriculum guides based on the exam, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests. Study guides and practice tests for students have also been developed.

The state provides some targeted assistance to help special student populations pass the exit exams, including remediation education programs and instructional extensions. The state uses its end-of-course exams for specific courses to gather diagnostic data that could be used to address student weaknesses in content areas assessed by the GHSGT.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exam. The state has not conducted research on outcomes of the exit exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers 2005

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition*	Science	Social Studies
All students	92%	95%	89%	67%	83%
Male	92%	93%	86%	71%	84%
Female	92%	96%	92%	64%	82%
White	96%	97%	94%	80%	91%
Black	85%	92%	83%	50%	72%
Hispanic	87%	86%	73%	50%	73%
Asian	98%	95%	89%	77%	90%
Native American	90%	93%	81%	71%	81%
English language learners/LEP	78%	64%	43%	26%	46%
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Students with disabilities	58%	70%	51%	30%	46%

Note: Data includes all first time grade 11 test-takers (except those who took the test with nonstandard accommodations)

*Data for Writing/composition refers to information from the fall 2004 administration Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT).

Cumulative Pass Rates

The state indicated that cumulative pass rates are not calculated.

Higher Education

The state reports that it has no statewide protocol specifying how institutions of higher education will use GHSGT scores, but the state does place the GHSGT scores on student transcripts. According to the Center's 2003 report, public universities in Georgia reported that they do not use the GHSGT for admissions, scholarship, or course placement decisions. However, a limited number of students who fail the exam, receive a certificate of performance, and then obtain a GED may be admitted to a two-year college in the state university system. In addition, if a student who does not pass the graduation test shows exceptional promise for success—for example, through SAT scores—he or she may be admitted as a Presidential Exception to any institution in the Georgia state university system.

State K-12 education officials report having had no discussions with higher education officials about linking the content of the GHSGT to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

Georgia End-of-Course Tests (EOCT) exist in ninth grade literature, American literature, algebra, geometry, U.S. history, economics, physical science, and biology. These are not used for high school exit exams. In addition, the state does not administer college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Idaho

Test Name: Idaho Standards Achievement Tests
Subjects Tested: Reading, language usage, and mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10
Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The state reports that the official purpose of the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) is to ensure that students are meeting and learning Idaho's curriculum standards.

Historical and Policy Background

In January 2004, the Idaho legislature approved the state's first exit exam, the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests. The exam is authorized in Idaho Administrative Code, Rules Governing Thoroughness, 08.02.03. Idaho began administering the ISAT as an exit exam in 2004. Before the ISAT, the state did not administer an exit exam, but it did administer the ISAT to assess how well students were learning state curriculum standards. The class of 2006 will be the first class required to pass the ISAT in order to graduate.

The state is using a phase-in approach; the class of 2006 will be required to pass the exam at an eighth grade proficiency level instead of the full tenth grade mark. The class of 2007 must pass the exams at a ninth grade level, and the class of 2008 must pass them at the full tenth grade proficiency level.

Test Characteristics

The Idaho Standards Achievement Tests are administered in mid-April through May to students in grades 2-10, with tenth graders required to pass for graduation. Students in grades 11 and 12 may retake the exam during optional administrations in July, mid-September through October, a winter window, and mid-April through May.

The state reports that the ISAT is a standards-based exam aligned to tenth grade standards. It was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. According to the state, the test has undergone an external review by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to determine whether it is aligned to state standards. The state board of education requested an additional external review by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) during 2004. The HumRRO study included a review of the validity and reliability of the ISAT exams administered in grades 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10 and looked at the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exam. The results are available on the state board website at <http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/ExtReview-May2005.asp>.

The ISAT tests reading, language usage, and mathematics and is administered on a computer. The tests consist of multiple-choice questions. The ISAT is not a timed exam. The state does not require students who are home schooled to take the assessment, but it does require private schools that seek state accreditation to administer the ISAT.

NCLB

Since school year 2002-03, ISAT results in reading and math have been used to determine adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. The state has not decided whether the science test required for NCLB purposes in 2007-08 will be a graduation requirement. The state will eventually

use the same cut score to award high school diplomas as it uses for NCLB purposes, but the state is using lower cut scores for graduation for the classes of 2006 and 2007. The first test in the spring of grade 10 will count for NCLB purposes.

Scoring and Reporting

The performance levels for the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests are below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The tests are scored on a Rasch Unit (RIT) scale from roughly 150-300, and the passing scores are 224 for reading, 222 for language use, and 242 for mathematics. The results are generated for schools 24 hours after the administration of the exam. The district determines when to report scores to students and parents. Most districts allow results to be displayed on a computer screen for the student immediately at the end of the test. Reports include information on whether students reach proficiency and their overall subject area scores and subscores of skills and content under each major subject area. State, district, and school results are reported to the public one and one-half months after each official administration in the fall and spring. Test questions are not released each year.

School districts are not required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state, however, has provided each district with a computerized remediation or advancement program called the Idaho Plato Learning Network, or IPLN; the program is available to all students.

While there is continued discussion at the state level, Idaho has not yet developed a system of individual student identifiers to track student performance.

Student Options

Students have eight opportunities to retake the exam by the end of grade 12. The first retest option occurs in July after tenth grade. The state has not yet discussed whether to allow students who meet all other graduation requirements except passing the ISAT the opportunity to retake the exam after twelfth grade and receive a regular diploma. The state allows transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet Idaho graduation requirements, if the exams are standards-based, test tenth grade material at a minimum, and cover subjects comparable to those tested on the ISAT. The exit exams that can currently be substituted are those from Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas. The state will allow students in the class of 2006 to substitute for the ISAT scores of 17 on the ACT or 200 on the SAT in English, and scores of 19 on the ACT or 400 on the SAT in math. Since the first class has not graduated, information is not yet available about how many students use this option.

Students who do not pass the ISAT may appeal to their local school board. The school board can decide whether to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency of the achievement standards through some other locally established mechanism. All locally established mechanisms must meet rules set by the state board of education. Specifically, the proficiency measures used must meet all of the following criteria:

- They must be aligned at a minimum to tenth grade state content standards.
- They must be aligned to the state content standards for the subject matter in question.
- They must be valid and reliable.
- Ninety percent of the criteria of the measure or combination of measures used must be based on academic proficiency and performance.

Before appealing to the local school board for an alternate measure, the student must meet one of the following enrollment criteria:

1. Be enrolled in a special education program and have an individualized education program
2. Be enrolled in a limited English proficient program for three academic years or less
3. Be enrolled in the fall semester of the senior year

There are no alternate diplomas or certificates available for general education students who do not receive regular diplomas.

The state is unable to report the number of attempts made by students to pass each section of the exam, since this information is collected only at the district level.

Special Populations

The state allows testing accommodations for students with disabilities and students identified as limited English proficient. Students with disabilities and English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities in the classes of 2006 and 2007 can apply for an appeal if they have an IEP that outlines alternate requirements for graduation or if adaptations are recommended on the test. ELL students are exempt for the first year that they are enrolled in a U.S. school, but they must subsequently take the exam. Additionally, English language learners in the classes of 2006 and 2007 who have been in a LEP program for less than three academic years can also be exempted.

The state reports that it provides a full range of accommodations for special education students. All of the accommodations must be outlined in the student's IEP. Various accommodations are also provided for English language learners. The accommodations for both groups of students are the same as those used on all other statewide tests. There are no special diplomas or certificates intended specifically for students with disabilities or English language learners who do not receive a regular diploma. If provided for in the IEP, students can meet alternate graduation requirements. The state does not test in any language but English, but competency in English is not required to receive a high school diploma. The state does not provide targeted assistance to help English language learners pass the exams.

Support Policies

The state does not require school districts to provide remedial services for students who fail the ISAT, nor are these students required to attend remediation programs. During the 2005 legislative session, the state legislature appropriated \$5.1 million for technology or remediation programs to be allocated to Idaho public school districts.

In addition, the state-funded Idaho Digital Learning Academy has developed an ISAT prep class. The legislature recently increased funding for this program by \$450,000. Originally there was a small fee for these classes, but with additional appropriations this past legislative session, these classes will be free beginning September 1, 2005. More information about ISAT Prep can be found on the state website at <http://idla.k12.id.us/> (click on the ISAT Prep link on the left side of the screen).

As noted above, the state has also developed computer-based remediation programs to assist students. Materials have also been converted to Braille and large print.

Monitoring

The state does not attach any additional accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts to student performance on the test, other than the accountability measures in NCLB.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading	Language Usage
All students	85.5%	90.1%	93.1%
Male	85.7%	89.2%	90.5%
Female	85.3%	90.9%	95.7%
White	87.9%	92.8%	94.8%
Black	75.7%	80.0%	88.2%
Hispanic	66.1%	67.4%	79.1%
Asian	90.4%	86.0%	85.7%
Native American	73.6%	86.8%	85.4%
English language learners/LEP	61.6%	56.9%	71.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch	76.7%	81.1%	87.3%
Students with disabilities	44.7%	50.4%	61.8%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Cumulative pass rates are not available because the exam is currently being phased in.

Graduation Rates

In 2003, the graduation rate for all students was 81%. The state uses the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) formula to calculate graduation rates.

Higher Education

Public universities and community colleges in Idaho do not use the ISAT for college admissions, scholarships, or course placement. The state reports that conversations between higher education and K-12 officials are ongoing due to the recent introduction of the ISAT as an exit exam.

Other High School Assessments

Idaho has just added a new science exam. While not part of the high school assessments system, the state is piloting the exam in grades 5, 7, and 10. In addition, the state department of education has offered a series of optional, state-developed end-of-course exams to districts for several years. Some districts use this resource. The state does not have any college readiness exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Indiana

Test Name: Graduation Qualifying Exam

Subjects Tested: English language arts and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The state's official policy position on the purpose of the Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE) was laid out in the law authorizing the exam. It states that beginning with the class of students who expect to graduate during the 1999-2000 school year, each student is required to meet (1) the academic standards tested in the graduation examination, and (2) any additional requirements established by the governing body to be eligible to graduate.

Historical and Policy Background

Indiana Code 20-10.1-16 authorizes the use of the Graduation Qualifying Exam as a graduation requirement. This is the first high school exit exam ever administered by the state. The exams were first administered in 1997 in grade 10. Diplomas were first withheld in the 1999-2000 school year. New standards were put in place for the class of 2007 and were tested for the first time in fall 2004. After this administration, cut scores for the test were revised. The math test now includes all math through grade 8, as well as algebra I skills, which are covered by 30% of test items.

The state reports no other major policy changes since the exams were authorized and has no plans to implement a new exam.

Test Characteristics

The Graduation Qualifying Exam is administered in September and March. The state considers the GQE to be a standards-based exam aligned to ninth grade standards, including algebra I. It tests English language arts and mathematics. It was developed collaboratively by the state of Indiana and a testing company. The GQE has undergone a review by the outside group Achieve, Inc., to determine whether it is aligned to state standards. The state has participated in the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum project to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exams.

The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer and writing prompt/essay questions. The math exam is 180 minutes, and the English language arts exam is 194 minutes. All students are allowed to use calculators on portions of the math test. Private school students who attend accredited private schools are required to pass the GQE.

NCLB

The state began using the GQE to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in the 2002-03 school year. The results from the first time a student takes the exam count toward NCLB accountability. The state is using the same cut scores for NCLB proficiency as it is for awarding diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the GQE. The performance levels for the graduation exam are pass+, pass, and did not pass. The English language arts test is scored on a scale of 220-820, and students must score a 551 to pass. The math

exam is scored on a scale of 300-920, and students must score a 586. Scores are reported to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public one and a half months after testing occurs. Results are released to the public after each administration. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed and showing their scores and subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area and for open-ended items. Some of the questions from the exit exams, along with sample reports, are released to schools, teachers, and students and are posted on the Internet. The state has developed a system of student-level identifiers for tracking student achievement.

Student Options

Students have four opportunities to retake the exam before the end of the twelfth grade. Students can first retake the exam in the fall after tenth grade. The state or district is required to provide students who fail the exam with information and optional remediation opportunities to help them prepare for future administrations. If students have not passed the exit exam but have met the other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam after the twelfth grade as many times as they need to and receive a diploma. The state does not disaggregate passing rates for students who take the exam after twelfth grade and does not collect information on the number of times students try to pass the exam.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other state exams to meet graduation requirements in Indiana, nor does it allow students to pass substitute exams in place of the GQE. Students who fall short of a passing score on the graduation exam and do not meet the requirements laid out in the legislation may be eligible to graduate if they do all of the following:

1. Take the graduation exam in each subject in which they failed to achieve a passing score at least one time every school year after the school year in which they first took the exam.
2. Complete remediation opportunities provided by their school.
3. Maintain a school attendance rate of at least 95%, with excused absences not counting against attendance.
4. Maintain at least a C average or the equivalent in the courses specifically required for graduation.
5. Obtain a written recommendation from their teachers in each subject area in which they did not achieve a passing score. The school principal must concur with the recommendation. The recommendation also must be supported by documentation that the student has attained the academic standard in the subject area, based on classroom work or tests other than the graduation exam.
6. Otherwise satisfy all state and local graduation requirements.

Under Indiana law, the principal must certify that students meet all graduation requirements. In 2004, the state reported that 5% of students used the waiver/appeals process. There are no alternate diplomas or certificates available for general education students who do not receive a regular diploma.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are allowed to use the same accommodations on the GQE and all other statewide tests. The exams have been translated into large print and Braille for students with visual disabilities. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma.

If a student with a disability does not achieve a passing score on the graduation exam, the student's case conference committee may determine that the student is eligible to graduate if the committee finds the following:

1. The student's teacher of record, in consultation with a teacher of the student in each subject area in which the student has not achieved a passing score, makes a written recommendation to the case conference committee. The recommendation must meet both of the following criteria:
 - a. Be endorsed by the principal of the student's school
 - b. Be supported by documentation that the student has attained the academic standard in the subject area, based on classroom work or tests other than the graduation exam
2. The student meets all of the following requirements:
 - a. Retakes the graduation exam in each subject area in which he or she did not achieve a passing score as often as required by the student's individualized education program
 - b. Completes remediation opportunities provided by the student's school to the extent required by the IEP
 - c. Maintains a school attendance rate of at least 95% to the extent required by the student's IEP, with excused absences not counting against attendance
 - d. Maintains at least a C average or the equivalent in the courses specifically required for graduation
 - e. Otherwise satisfies all state and local graduation requirements

Additionally, students with significant cognitive disabilities who take the alternate assessment instead of the exit exam receive a certificate that is distinct from a high school diploma.

English Language Learners

English language learners may use accommodations for the GQE. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. ELLs may be exempt from testing if they are not proficient in English, but this exemption is temporary, and every student must ultimately take the test and pass or receive a waiver. While the state does not have a specific law stating that English proficiency is required for a high school diploma, English is both the official state language and the language of instruction and students must pass the English language arts section of the exam to graduate. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests specifically for English language learners, except those available to general education students. There are also no special diplomas or certificates for English language learners who do not receive a regular diploma. The state does not offer the exit exam in languages other than English or offer any special assistance to help ELLs pass the exam.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the GQE. While students are not required to attend these programs, they are ineligible for state waivers if they do not. In 2004-05, the state committed \$11 million for remediation services for students in grades 10-12 who failed the exam. These funds were allocated using a three-tiered method based on student and district performance. Districts with the lowest-performing students received the greatest levels of funding.

The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the state high school exit exams, such as programs to familiarize them with the exam and train them how to interpret test results and use returned applied skills materials

and released items. The state has also developed information guides explaining the tests. While the state has not developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for the GQE for students, many programs of this type are funded under the remediation grant programs.

The state provides free appropriate public education, adult education, free access for adult test takers at 97 additional testing sites, and direct mail notification of retests to students who have failed the exam but met the other graduation requirements.

Monitoring

In addition to NCLB accountability requirements, Indiana has its own accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exam. The GQE is one of several criteria on which Indiana high schools must demonstrate satisfactory progress to meet state guidelines and avoid sanctions.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in School Year 2004-2005

Subgroups	Math	Reading/Language Arts
All students	64%	68%
Male	66%	63%
Female	63%	73%
White	70%	74%
Black	31%	40%
Hispanic	44%	43%
Asian	83%	74%
Native American	53%	55%
English language learners/LEP	40%	31%
Free or reduced-price lunch	43%	48%
Students with disabilities	23%	21%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Cumulative pass rates are not available at the state level but will be available for the class of 2006.

Graduation Rates

The graduation data is for the class of 2004. The rate was calculated by determining the number of dropouts in each high school grade and then dividing the remaining students by the total number of students. School year 2004-05 was the last year that this formula was used; in the future the state will be using a student level cohort rate.

Subgroups	Rate
All students	90%
Male	88%
Female	91%
White	91%
Black	86%
Hispanic	85%
Asian	96%
Native American	83%
English language learners/LEP	NA
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	NA

Higher Education

According to the Center's 2003 study of high school exit exams, public universities and community colleges do not use the Graduation Qualifying Exam scores for anything other than to determine whether the student has passed. Students can be admitted to most public universities with a GED or if they have received a waiver from their high school exempting them from the exam. Students without a high school diploma can attend Indiana community colleges under the Ability to Benefit program, which allows students to enroll on the condition they will complete a high school equivalency program within one year.

The state K-12 education agency has had discussions with higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college. At this point, however, the state has indicated that the exit exam does not meet these needs and is considering using end-of-course assessments for this purpose.

Other High School Assessments

Indiana administers statewide end-of-course exams that are not used for exit exam purposes. It has not developed any college readiness exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Louisiana

Test Name: Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century

Subjects Tested: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies

Initial Grade Tested: 10 and 11

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The Louisiana Department of Education has an unofficial position on the purpose of its Graduation Exit Exam for the 21st Century (GEE 21), which the state commonly communicates as follows: “The GEE 21 validates the high school diploma in that students who receive a high school diploma can read, write, and handle mathematical operations.”

Historical and Policy Background

State law created the Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century, and state board policy in Bulletin 741 made this exam a graduation requirement. The GEE 21 tests in English language arts and mathematics were first administered in 2000-01 to tenth graders. Students are required to score at the “approaching basic” level or above on both tests to be eligible for a high school diploma.

The GEE 21 science and social studies tests were administered to the first cohort of students in 2001-02; the results of these tests did not count toward graduation for the first cohort only but did count toward school accountability. High school students who were first-time tenth graders in 2001–02 and all classes thereafter must score at the approaching basic level or above on either the science or social studies test (as well as the English language arts and math tests) to be eligible for a high school diploma.

Before the GEE 21, the state administered the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE). Currently, school districts are responsible for administering the GEE twice each year for students who have completed their Carnegie units and still need to pass this test to earn a standard high school diploma. The state has no plans to replace the GEE 21 in the near future. There have been no major policy changes since the authorization of the GEE 21.

Test Characteristics

The GEE 21 tests are administered in March as the main administration. Retest opportunities are available in June and October for all eligible students and in February for seniors only. The state considers the GEE 21 to be a standards-based exam aligned with standards for grades 9-12. It was developed by a testing company specifically for Louisiana. The state has contracted with WestEd for an independent alignment study. The study was not available for analysis in this report.

The GEE 21 tests English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The exam consists of multiple-choice, short-answer and writing prompt/essay questions. The tests are all untimed. All students are allowed to use calculators on certain portions of the mathematics test.

Home-schooled students do not earn a standard Louisiana high school diploma but instead earn a GED. The state does not require nonpublic high schools to administer the GEE 21, but it does make the test available to approved nonpublic high schools with the same student graduation requirements as public high schools. These nonpublic high schools may issue a standard Louisiana high school diploma. Nonpublic schools that do not administer the GEE 21 issue their own nonpublic diploma.

NCLB

In school year 2002-03, the state began using the entire GEE 21 to meet the high school testing requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act. The results from the first time a student takes the exam count toward NCLB accountability. The state is using the science test to meet NCLB science testing requirements. The achievement levels for NCLB proficiency will be different, however, from those used to award diplomas. NCLB proficiency has been set at the basic level, while for graduation purposes students need only achieve at the approaching basic level or above.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the GEE 21. The performance levels for the graduation exam are advanced, mastery, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory. On a scale of 100-500, students must score 286 in math, 270 in English language arts, 267 in science, and 275 in social studies to pass. These are the cut scores for the approaching basic level and above.

Scores are reported to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public two months after testing occurs. Results are released to the public after each administration. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed and showing their scores and subscores for skills and content under each major subject area. Some of the questions from the exit exams, along with sample reports, are released to schools, teachers, and students and posted on the Internet. In addition, the state has a student history system that permits tracking of individual achievement results. This information is available to schools and districts.

Student Options

Students have six opportunities to retake the English language arts and mathematics exams and three opportunities to retake the science and social studies exams by the end of the twelfth grade. The June retest after the initial administration is the first opportunity students have to retake the exam. When students fail the exams, the state or district is required to provide them with information, such as remediation requirements and future test dates, to help them prepare for future administrations. If students have not passed the exit exam but have met the other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam an unlimited number of times after twelfth grade and receive a diploma. The state does not collect pass rate data on these students.

School district staff and parents of seniors had requested an earlier release of senior GEE results. In response, the February seniors-only retest was added to enable seniors to receive GEE 21 results the first week of April instead of the first week of May.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exams to meet graduation requirements in Louisiana. The state does not allow students to submit scores from alternate exams to substitute for passing the exit exam. The state does not offer any waiver or appeals process for students who fail the GEE 21, nor does it offer alternate diplomas or certificates for general education students who do not receive a regular diploma.

Special Populations

Students with disabilities and English language learners may use the same accommodations on the GEE 21 that are available to them for all state tests. Students with disabilities and English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests that would permit students with disabilities or English language learners to receive a regular diploma.

Some students with disabilities are eligible for a Certificate of Achievement instead of a regular diploma. This is generally reserved for students who participate in the Louisiana Alternate Assessment.

There are no special diplomas or certificates for English language learners who do not pass the exam, nor is there any special exemption for ELL students because they lack English competency or for any other reason. While the state does not have a policy stating that all students must be competent in English, proficiency in English is required, in that students must pass the English language arts section of the exit exam to obtain a diploma. The state does not provide any special programs to assist ELL students in passing the exam.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the GEE 21. Students are not required to attend remediation programs, but if they do not attend remediation, they are ineligible for any state waiver or appeal. In 2004-05, the state committed \$2.7 million to remediation services for students in grades 10 and 11 who failed the exam. These funds were allocated on a per pupil basis. Districts must provide 50 hours of remediation in each content area.

The state makes available a wide variety of remediation programs, such as after-school and weekend tutorial programs, computer-based programs, practice tests, and remediation courses for high school students that can earn them up to 2.0 Carnegie units. Materials are also made available in Braille and large print.

The state has supported and established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the exit exam, such as training teachers in ways to teach test-taking skills, training them how to interpret test results, and familiarizing them with the exam. The state has also developed curriculum guides based on the exam, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests.

The state offers adult education to students who fail the exam but have met other graduation requirements.

Monitoring

In addition to the NCLB accountability requirements, Louisiana has its own accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exam. Chapter 13 of the Louisiana School, District and State Accountability Bulletin 111 states that a school will receive recognition and monetary awards (assuming funds are appropriated by the legislature) when it achieves a growth label of exemplary or recognized academic growth.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Science	Social Studies
All students	77%	82%	81%	84%
Male	77%	77%	84%	85%
Female	76%	86%	79%	83%
White	88%	91%	93%	92%
Black	62%	70%	66%	73%
Hispanic	75%	77%	84%	86%
Asian	90%	85%	85%	88%
Native American	81%	87%	91%	91%
English language learners/LEP	67%	56%	66%	69%
Free or reduced-price lunch	69%	75%	71%	76%
Students with disabilities	27%	27%	38%	44%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The cumulative pass rate for students in 2004 was 94%. The state did not report disaggregated pass rate data for student subgroups. To calculate the pass rate, the state compared the total number in the twelfth grade class with the number of students who ultimately passed the assessment. The pass rate does not include students who were granted a waiver, took an alternate assessment, or met the graduation requirement through other means.

Graduation Rates

Louisiana reports the following graduation rates for the 2003-04 school year:

Subgroups	Graduation Rate
All students	88.3%
Male	85.4%
Female	90.9%
White	92.1%
Black	83.1%
Hispanic	88.5%
Asian	94.9%
Native American	89.4%
English language learners/LEP	78.7%
Free or reduced-price lunch	80.4%
Students with disabilities	40.2%

These rates were calculated by dividing the number of twelfth graders who began the 2003-04 school year (using October 1, 2003, enrollment data) by the number of graduates at the end of the 2003-04 school year. In other words, the graduation rates show the percentage of students who made it to grade 12 and graduated in that same year. Louisiana is in the process of developing a method to track students from the ninth grade until school completion to arrive at school completion and graduation rates for an entire cohort.

Higher Education

State high school exit exam scores are not used in making decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. State secondary education and higher education officials have not discussed linking the content of state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college. The state reports that it has not developed any college readiness exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, June 2005.

Maryland

Test Name: Maryland High School Assessment

Subjects Tested: English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government

Initial Grade Tested: Varies

Test Type: End-of-course

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The understood purpose of the Maryland High School Assessments (HSAs) is to assure that all Maryland high school graduates have attained a minimum level of achievement, although the state notes that this purpose is not explicitly stated in law or official policy.

Historical and Policy Background

In 1983, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted regulations that required students to pass a state exam in order to graduate from high school. In 1989, when these requirements took effect, students were required to pass the Maryland Functional Test, a minimum competency test in reading, math, and writing, before they could receive a diploma. The class of 2004 was the last graduating class required to take the Maryland Functional Test as an exit exam.

In 1996, the state board of education approved the development of a series of challenging, end-of-course exams, called the Maryland High School Assessments, that would eventually replace the Maryland Functional Tests as the state exit exam. That same year, the state board approved the Core Learning Goals, which outline the skills and content to be tested by the HSAs. In 2003, the state set passing scores for the assessments, and in June 2004, the state board voted to make the High School Assessments a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2009 (entering freshman in 2005).

New Maryland graduation regulations allow for the first compensatory scoring system for an exit exam system in the United States. Under this approach, students may meet the graduation testing requirement by either (1) achieving the passing scores previously approved by the state board on all four HSA subject tests; or (2) meeting a minimum score on each test (which is lower than previously set passing score) and achieving a combined score on all four exams that is equal to the sum of the previously approved passing scores. The compensatory option allows a student to underachieve on one or more tests but compensate for it by exceeding the passing score on other tests. In 2005, the state set minimum scores for algebra/data analysis, biology, and government for students who want to use the combined score option. In November 2005, the state will establish a passing score for the English 2 test and a total combined minimum score for all four tests.

Also this year, the state established a task force to examine alternative options for ascertaining the skills and knowledge of special education students and others who would not be successful on the HSAs, even with continued intervention. The task force consists of a broad range of stakeholders, including K-12 educators, higher education representatives, advocates for students with special needs, parents, and students. The task force must report to the state board by September 2007.

Test Characteristics

Students will be required to take the exam in January or May of the year they complete the course in the subject being tested. A summer administration will occur in July/August. The state considers the HSAs to be end-of-course exams tied to content standards. The tests were developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. Only one of the tests has undergone review by an outside source to determine its alignment to state standards. Home-schooled and private school students are not required to pass the tests to graduate.

The Maryland High School Assessments test English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. The English 1 test was replaced with an English 2 test in May 2005. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. Students are given 150 minutes each to complete the algebra/data analysis and biology tests, 155 minutes to complete the government test, and 170 minutes to complete the English 2 test. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

NCLB

Beginning this year, the English 2 test (which replaced the English 1 test) serves as the state's grade 10 reading assessment for the No Child Left Behind Act. The biology HSA assessment will be used to meet the science testing requirements of NCLB for students in grades 10-12.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the exam. The scales of the HSAs range from 0 to 800; to pass, students need a 412 in algebra/data analysis, 394 in government, and 400 in biology. The English 2 passing score will be set in November 2005. Students may choose an option to meet a combined score on all the tests that is equal to the sum of the passing scores. However, they must also achieve the following minimum score on each test: algebra/data analysis 402, government 387, and biology 391, with the English 2 score to be set later. When passing becomes a graduation requirement, the results will be reported nine weeks after the administration. Results will be released to the public annually. Reports include subject area scores and, for 2004, included subscores of skills and content under each major subject area. Test forms are also posted on the Internet each year. If students fail the exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information, such as remediation requirements, to help prepare them for future administrations of the test. The state does not currently have a system of student-level identifiers to track achievement results. However, local school systems can use local databases to track achievement levels of students.

Student Options

Students who fail the exit exam must first seek interventions or other appropriate assistance before they can take a retest. They may retake a test after completing assistance activities. Retesting is offered during the January, May, or summer administrations. Students can retake a test until they receive a passing score or reach age 21. The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Maryland. But if a transfer student passes a course equivalent to one of the courses tested and is granted credit for the respective course by the school he or she is entering, the student is exempted from taking the test. The state also plans to allow other tests to be substituted for the High School Assessments. The state does not have a waiver or appeals process yet in place. As noted above, a task force has been established to examine alternative options for special education students and other students who are unable to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills in the traditional testing situation. The state is also looking into the option of allowing students to substitute an already existing test to meet the requirement.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows justified and documented accommodations for students with IEPs, temporary or long-term disabilities, or section 504 plans on the HSAs and all other statewide tests. The state has developed a Braille version of the test and is currently developing Braille versions of the public

release test forms. Students in these subgroups who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. There are no special alternate routes, waivers, exclusions and/or substitute tests to allow these students to obtain a regular high school diploma, other than the options available to all students. Students with disabilities who do not pass the High School Assessment can receive a certificate of program completion, however. The Maryland High School Certificate is awarded to a student with disabilities who cannot meet the requirement for a diploma but has been enrolled in an education program for at least four years beyond grade 8 or its age equivalent and meets either of the following criteria: (1) is determined by an IEP team, with the agreement of the parents, to have developed appropriate skills for the individual to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life; or (2) will have reached age 21 by the end of the student's current school year.

Maryland is considering the use of a technology-based assessment for students with disabilities who cannot pass the state's exam using accommodations but are performing at higher levels than students who receive a high school certificate instead of a diploma. The state is categorizing this technology-based assessment as a comparable exam to the HSAs, rather than an alternative exam, to stress the fact that the exam is not necessarily testing lower standards.

English Language Learners

The state allows justified and documented appropriate accommodations identified by the ELL committee for students who meet the criteria for an English language learner program. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. ELL students are not exempt from taking the exam for any reason. The exam is not offered in languages other than English. The state does not offer any targeted intervention for ELL students other than providing them with testing accommodations. There are no special alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests to allow these students to obtain a regular high school diploma, other than the options available to all students. Nor are there any special certificates for English language learners who do not pass the high school exit exam.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the High School Assessments, and students are required to attend remediation programs if they wish to retake the test. The state has supported programs to familiarize teachers with the content of the HSAs, including annual release of a test form. The state currently offers algebra/data analysis tools online for teachers to use with students or to enhance their own knowledge. Fifteen of Maryland's 24 school systems are currently using the tool with students or for professional development with teachers. A similar program for the government test will be available in fall 2005.

The Maryland Bridge to Excellence Act targets assistance to students receiving special education services, students with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students. Passed in 2002, this Act increases funding to public schools and directs more funding to students with special needs. Each Maryland school district has submitted to the state a five-year master plan documenting goals and strategies for improving achievement among all groups of students, including special education, limited English proficient, or economically disadvantaged students. The Act is expected to increase funding for Maryland education by \$1.3 billion by 2008. School systems receive a minimum amount of funding per student, plus additional funds based on the numbers of special needs students. Local school systems can decide how to spend the money as long as they demonstrate improvement in student achievement and develop a satisfactory master plan.

The state is developing optional formative assessments and related tools to provide diagnostic and instructional help for students having difficulty passing an assessment. The state department of education will provide online instructional courseware that teachers can access to obtain instructional modules matched to state standards. The courseware is now being piloted and will be available in algebra/data analysis in school year 2005-06 for instruction and remediation. Other courses are being planned. In fiscal year 2004-05, a total of \$350,000 was allocated for this purpose, and an additional \$220,000 was allocated in fiscal year 2005-06.

A complete form of each of the four High School Assessments is made public and posted on the state education website after each testing. Currently, tests from 2000 through 2003 can be found at mdk12.org. Teachers and students have a growing pool of publicly available test items that they can study and incorporate into appropriate assistance activities.

The graduation regulations adopted in June 2004 by the state board of education also provide for a Diploma by Examination. Maryland citizens not enrolled in high school may pursue this diploma, which requires the successful completion of the GED assessments or the Maryland Adult External Diploma Program assessment.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math (Algebra/ Data Analysis)	Reading/ Language Arts (English I)	Science (Biology)	Social Studies (Government)
All students	58.8%	53.0%	60.9%	65.9%
Male	57.4%	45.4%	58.3%	62.2%
Female	60.2%	60.9%	63.5%	69.6%
White	73.4%	64.8%	75.0%	76.3%
Black	35.2%	34.9%	38.4%	49.0%
Hispanic	49.5%	40.3%	47.8%	56.1%
Asian	80.7%	70.8%	79.7%	82.7%
Native American	51.2%	49.2%	63.1%	65.6%
English language learners/LEP	35.6%	14.9%	27.2%	40.1%
Free or reduced-price lunch	38.1%	30.1%	36.6%	45.3%
Students with disabilities	19.0%	12.3%	22.7%	25.4%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Cumulative pass rates are not yet available because the HSAs do not become a graduation requirement until the class of 2009.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates shown below are for the class of 2004. The graduation rate represents the percentage of students who received a Maryland high school diploma during the reported school year. This is an estimated cohort rate. It is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates by the sum of the number of students who dropped out during grades 9 through 12 in consecutive years and the number of high school graduates.

All students	84.3%
Male	81.1%
Female	87.5%
White	88.2%
Black	77.1%
Hispanic	82.6%
Asian	94.5%
Native American	76.7%
English language learners/LEP	86.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch	80.1%
Students with disabilities	77.6%

Higher Education

Because the current Phase I Maryland High School Assessments are administered primarily in ninth and tenth grade and are required of all students pursuing a diploma, they are not considered to be college preparation tests and performance on these tests is not necessarily an indicator of college readiness. Maryland regulations require that student performance on the HSAs be recorded on the high school transcript. If Maryland moves forward with Phase II of the HSAs, which call for tests in advanced mathematics, chemistry, and other challenging subjects, then students' test performance may have more relevance to higher education institutions.

Maryland's K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning is an alliance among the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland. The purpose of the partnership is to develop strategies for strengthening K-16 connections, standards, competencies, assessments, professional development of educators, and community engagement in educational activities. The partnership has discussed the Maryland High School Assessments many times during development of the tests. In fact, higher education institutions were involved in developing the Maryland Core Learning Goals (the content tested by the HSAs).

Other High School Assessments

As noted above, the state currently administers an end-of-course geometry exam for NCLB but not for graduation purposes. Additionally, Maryland is working on a pilot project to create a college readiness exam in mathematics.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Massachusetts

Test Name: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

Subjects Tested: English language arts and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The purpose of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exit exam is to ensure that students who graduate from Massachusetts public high schools have achieved grade 10 standards in English language arts and mathematics. Test items are based on the learning standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Historical and Policy Background

The Education Reform Act of 1993 authorized the state to establish educational goals and raise standards for all public elementary and secondary schools in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. In addition, the Education Reform Law required students to attain a competency determination as a condition for high school graduation. Students from the class of 2003 on must meet or exceed the “needs improvement” threshold score of 220 on both the English language arts and mathematics MCAS grade 10 tests to satisfy the competency determination requirement. Students who do not pass one or both grade 10 tests on the first try have multiple opportunities to retake the tests. In June 2005, the state board of education voted to add science to the MCAS as a graduation requirement for the class of 2010.

There are no plans to replace MCAS at this time.

Test Characteristics

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System is administered in the spring of each year. In 2005, the English language arts composition test was administered in April and the language and literature and mathematics tests were administered in May. Retests were administered in July, November, and March. The state considers the MCAS to be a standards-based test aligned with grade 10 standards. The test was developed collaboratively by the state department of education, a testing contractor, and Massachusetts educators. The MCAS has undergone alignment reviews by the state and by Achieve, Inc. Each test item undergoes multiple reviews, as follows:

1. Assessment Development Committees review each test item for alignment with the curriculum standards before and after field testing.
2. Two external reviewers review each test item against the standards.
3. The testing contractor and the Massachusetts Department of Education select items that will be used on different forms of the test before field testing.
4. A bias review committee reviews each test item.

No studies have yet been conducted to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the MCAS.

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay, and extended-response questions. The MCAS math test is 60 minutes per session for a total of 180 minutes, and the English language arts test is 45 minutes per session for a total

of 225 minutes. Although individual test sessions are designed to be completed within 45 or 60 minutes, students may take additional time to complete a test session. All students may use calculators on session two only of the two sessions of the math test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not eligible to take the MCAS and are therefore not required to pass it to receive diplomas.

NCLB

Massachusetts began using MCAS results for reporting adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002-03. Results from the grade 10 MCAS test are used to fulfill NCLB requirements. Students who do not pass one or both MCAS tests on the first try have multiple opportunities to retake the tests they did not pass. The state is currently using a different achievement level for NCLB proficiency than for awarding high school diplomas. The current cut score for a competency determination has been set at the needs improvement level of performance. The state board had considered raising the cut score to the proficient level of performance, but tabled this idea and decided to first study adding a science requirement for the class of 2010. End-of-course science tests are under development and will be used as part of the exit exam beginning with the class of 2010.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees grade the open-ended questions of the MCAS. The four performance levels are advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. The test results are scored on a scale of 200-280, with a minimum score of 220 needed to pass. Scores in the needs improvement, proficient, and advanced levels are considered passing scores for each subject. The results are reported to school districts three months after testing, and to schools, students, parents, and the public four months after testing. Results are reported to the public after each administration. Reports include information about whether the student passed or failed and show the subject area scores and scores on individual test items, as well as scorer comments for the English language arts composition test. All test questions are released each year, along with sample student responses.

When students fail an exit exam, the state and district are not required to provide information to help them prepare for future test administrations.

Massachusetts has a system of student-level identifiers known as the Student Information Management System (SIMS) database, which includes 48 variables. Each student is assigned a state student identification number, which allows the state department of education to track achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have four opportunities by the end of grade 12 and unlimited opportunities thereafter to retake sections of the MCAS. Students first take the tests in the spring of grade 10 and can begin to retake the exam in November after the first administration, followed by a second retest opportunity in March. Students who fail the grade 10 test can take the MCAS retest, a focused test offered in November and March of each year. The retest is also offered in the summer for students who have completed grade 12. The state reports that it has information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the MCAS, but it was not available for this report. If students meet all other graduation requirements except passing the MCAS, they can retake the exam after the twelfth grade, but state data on pass rates for these students are not available. The state currently does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Massachusetts. Furthermore, the state does not allow students who fail the MCAS to earn a regular high school diploma by passing a substitute test. The state has not developed preparation and remediation programs and materials to help students pass the exit exams.

While the majority of students earn a competency determination by passing MCAS tests, a minority of students are given an opportunity to demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge needed to meet the competency determination standard by filing a performance appeal. To be eligible for a performance appeal, a student must have taken the grade 10 test in the area of the appeal at least three times, have a 95% attendance record during the school years before and during the appeal, receive a minimum score of 216 at least once, and have participated in the tutoring and academic support services made available by the school. For the majority of appeals filed, the grades of the student under appeal are compared with those of his or her classmates who passed with scores of 220-228. Approximately 3,974 appeals were filed between November 2002 and May 2004. The state has no other waiver processes in place.

Districts may award a state-endorsed Certificate of Attainment to students who have not passed the MCAS and who meet the eligibility requirements for this certificate. To be eligible, a student in the class of 2003 had to meet all of the following criteria:

- a) Completed a program of studies prescribed by the school committee or the student's IEP team
- b) Satisfactorily participated in the tutoring and other academic support services made available by the school
- c) Taken the grade 10 MCAS examination at least three times in each subject in which he or she did not achieve a passing score

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows students with disabilities to use standard and non-standard accommodations that are consistent with those used during routine instruction and are documented on the student's IEP. Details about accommodations can be found on the department of education website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/part_req.html. The state also has developed exit exam materials in Braille and large print and an electronic text reader (all in English). These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Students with significant disabilities can also apply for an alternate assessment, which consists of a portfolio of materials collected annually by the teacher and student. (Only 1% of students statewide take the alternate assessment.) Students who do not pass MCAS tests but meet all local requirements can receive a Certificate of Attainment, as described above.

Eligibility requirements are slightly adjusted for students with disabilities who enter into the performance appeal process. They are not required to attain a minimum score of 216 to be eligible for a performance appeal, but they must be able to demonstrate that they meet the competency determination standard.

English Language Learners

Only one accommodation is allowed by the state for current and former English language learners: these students may use an approved bilingual dictionary with word-to-word definitions. This accommodation is not allowed under other statewide tests; for example, English language learners may not use word-to-word bilingual dictionaries on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment. English language learners who pass the exit exam using the dictionary accommodation still receive a regular high school diploma. Eligible students can apply for a performance appeal.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for just a short time. Massachusetts does not have an official position stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English language arts section of the exit exam to receive a diploma. The state offers students the grade 10 math test and math retest in Spanish. Massachusetts has no special program or assistance targeted specifically to ELL students to help them pass the exit exam.

Support Policies

The state does not require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the MCAS, and students are not required to attend any remediation programs. Students who do not pass, however, are ineligible for any state waiver or appeals processes if they do not attend these programs. Districts can apply for Support Services Grants to support remediation efforts. These funds are distributed on a per pupil basis for students who fail state exams, including the exit exams, for grades 4-12. Funding for MCAS remediation was cut from \$50 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$15 million in fiscal year 2005. For fiscal year 2006, the state budget includes \$10.4 million specifically allocated for MCAS remediation in grades 4-12, with an additional \$5.5 million for targeted intervention to schools and districts that are under-performing.

The state has not supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the MCAS, but it did provide information guides explaining the tests. Released test items, sample student work, and scoring guides are available on the state department of education website as a means of assisting students.

Monitoring

The state is currently using MCAS scores as part of a Massachusetts school rating system that can lead to the identification of underperforming schools.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2003-04

Subgroups	Math	Reading/Language Arts*
All students	85%	89%
Male	84%	88%
Female	86%	92%
White	90%	93%
Black	68%	78%
Hispanic	63%	69%
Asian	91%	90%
Native American	79%	86%
English language learners/LEP	61%	48%
Free or reduced-price lunch	68%	75%
Students with disabilities	59%	65%

* Scores for reading language arts and writing composition are combined.

Cumulative Pass Rates

Subgroups	Rate
All students	96%
Male	95%
Female	96%
White	98%
Black	88%
Hispanic	85%
Asian	95%
Native American	94%
English language learners/LEP	78%
Free or reduced-price lunch	89%
Students with disabilities	84%

These rates are calculated using the number of students passing the English language arts and math tests or otherwise attaining the competency determination as the numerator and the March 2004 SIMS enrollment figures as the denominator. The pass rate includes students who passed MCAS tests, were awarded a performance appeal, and met the grade 10 standards on the alternate assessment.

Graduation Rates

The state reports that 96% of the high school cohort graduated in 2004. Data disaggregated by gender, race and other characteristics were not provided by the state. The graduation rate is calculated using the number of students passing the English language arts and math tests, or attaining the competency determination as the numerator and the March 2004 SIMS enrollment figures as the denominator. The rate includes students who passed MCAS tests, students who were awarded a performance appeal, and students who met the grade 10 standards on the alternate assessment.

Higher Education

The state uses scores on the MCAS to determine eligibility for two awards that provide a tuition waiver at a state college, university or community college: the Stanley J. Koplik Certificate of Mastery Award and the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship Award. Beginning with students in the class of 2005, the state is using first-time tenth grade scores on the MCAS to award the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship Award to students who meet all the following criteria:

- Score in the advanced category in at least one section (mathematics or English language arts) of the MCAS
- Score at least in the proficient category in mathematics and English language arts
- Score in the top 25% in the student's school district

Students may retake the test in grade 11 to attempt to qualify for the Koplik Award by scoring at the advanced level on one MCAS test and at the proficient level on the other (as well as meeting additional criteria). Students may receive both awards, but they are eligible for only one tuition waiver. According to the Center's 2003 exit exam report, public institutions of higher education did not use the MCAS for admissions or course placement because all students with a high school diploma passed the MCAS.

State K-12 education and higher education staff have had discussions about linking English language arts and mathematics content standards with college readiness standards.

Massachusetts is one of 13 states participating in the America Diploma Project. The governor convened a task force made up of members from the Board of Higher Education, the University of Massachusetts, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Department of Education. The task force is chaired by the Governor's education advisor. One of the task force action steps is to align the higher education and K-12 systems into a K-16 system. The task force has discussed using MCAS as an indicator of college course readiness. Currently, colleges and universities use the College Board's Accuplacer assessment to determine course placement.

Other High School Assessments

Massachusetts has developed end-of-course tests in science, which are scheduled to become exit exams beginning with the class of 2010. Students have a choice of biology, chemistry, introductory physics, and science/technology. The state does not administer any additional college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Minnesota

Test Name: Basic Skills Test

Subjects Tested: Reading, mathematics, and writing

Initial Grade Tested: 8 and 10

Test Type: Minimum competency

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official stated purpose of the Basic Skills Tests (BSTS) appears in the legislation authorizing the tests. Minnesota Rules, parts 3501.0010-0180, require statewide standards that define what a Minnesota public high school graduate should know and be able to do to function effectively as a purposeful thinker, effective communicator, self-directed learner, productive group participant, and responsible citizen.

Minnesota Rules, parts 3501.0200-0290, authorize the writing part of the Basic Skills Tests. This legislation establishes a statewide standard that describes what a Minnesota public high school student must demonstrate in written composition to be eligible for a high school diploma.

Historical and Policy Background

The Minnesota Rules authorize the use of the Basic Skills Test as a requirement for graduation. The state began to administer the math and reading sections in 1996, and these sections became mandatory for all students in 1998. The state began administering the writing section in 1999. Diplomas were first withheld for students who did not pass the BSTs in 2000. During a special session in summer 2005, the legislature replaced the BSTs with an existing set of tests, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, which are administered in grades 9, 10 and 11 and are considered more rigorous.

Test Characteristics

The writing composition test is administered in January in grades 10-12, and the math and reading tests are administered in February in grades 8-12. Retests are given in April to seniors only and in July to students in grades 8-12. The state considers the BST to be a minimum competency test. Because the state exit exam is not intended to be aligned to Minnesota Academic Standards, no alignment review has been conducted.

The Basic Skills Tests assess math and reading in grade 8 and writing in grade 10. The tests were developed by a testing company specifically for the state. The tests consist of multiple-choice and writing prompt/essay questions. All students are allowed to use calculators on a majority of the math items. In 2001, the Minnesota legislature adopted a requirement for the mathematics BST to include non-calculator computation items beginning in 2004. Students must now answer a subset of computation questions without a calculator. The BSTs are not timed.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the BST to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The state does not plan to use the BSTs to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The tests are not aligned with the state's standards. They are first administered in eighth grade, so they do not satisfy the NCLB requirement for a high school test.

Scoring and Reporting

Trained scorers employed by the BST contractor grade the writing test; there are no open-ended questions on the math and reading tests. The tests are scored on a scale that tops off at 750 for reading and 800 for math (reflecting changes by the legislature). To pass the exam, students must score 75% or attain a scale score of 600 in both reading and math. In writing, the holistic passing score is 3 on a scale of 0-4. No achievement levels have been assigned to various ranges of scores on the test.

Districts, schools, students, parents, and the public receive results about eight weeks after testing occurs. Results are publicly reported after each administration. Reports include information on whether students pass or fail and their scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area. Questions from the exam are not released every year. Items are released on occasion—the 1998 test, 1999 test, and selected reading passages and accompanying items are available. The Department has also provided sample tests for schools to use.

The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data, but the system does not include BST data. It does include information from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in grade 10 reading and grade 11 mathematics.

Student Options

Students have 11 opportunities to retake the math and reading tests by the end of the twelfth grade. The first time they can retake the exam is in July after the initial administration. The state or district is required to provide students who fail an exit exam with information to help them prepare for future administrations. To help students pass the exam, the state also allows regular education students to be eligible for any accommodation after April 1st of their senior year. Minnesota provides information about optional remediation opportunities and future test dates.

The state does not collect information about the number of times students take a particular BST. If students meet all other requirements to graduate except passing the BST, they can retake the exam after twelfth grade, but the state does not collect information on pass rates for these students.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Minnesota. The state does not allow scores from other tests to be substituted for the Basic Skills Test, and there is no process in place for students who fail to request waivers or appeal the exit exam. Alternate diplomas or certificates are not available for general education students who do not receive a regular diploma.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows test accommodations for students with disabilities if they are specified in the student's IEP or 504 plan. These accommodations include extended time; individual or small group administration; special settings; English audiocassettes for students who have difficulty with printed material on the math test only; directions given in any format such as signing, auditory, or amplification; magnification or low vision aids for visually impaired students; scribes; and use of a tape recorder to document student answers. In addition, the state has developed BST exams and materials in Braille and large print. These accommodations are the same as those used for other statewide testing programs.

Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. There are no appeals, waiver processes, special certificates or diplomas for students with disabilities who do not pass the exit exam. For students with an IEP or 504 plan, however, the IEP team may modify the cut score needed to pass. Students then receive a Pass Individual rather than a Pass State designation and receive a regular diploma.

English Language Learners

The state allows test accommodations for English language learners, including extended time, individual or small group administration, special settings, and English audiocassettes for students who have difficulty with printed material on the math test only. In addition, directions may be read, clarified, translated, or interpreted in any format or language. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. ELL students who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma.

The state translates the math BST into Hmong, Spanish, Somali, and Vietnamese. Districts may provide math BST translations in other languages as well. ELL students using these translated versions receive a Pass Translate notation on their record, rather than a Pass State designation, but they still receive a regular diploma. (The BSTs in reading and writing are not available in other languages.) The state exempts English language learners from taking the BST if they have been in a school where English was not the primary language of instruction for fewer than three years, but these exempted students will not earn a regular diploma until they pass the BSTs. Minnesota does not have an official position stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is required, in that all students must pass the reading and writing BSTs to receive a diploma. There are no appeals, waiver processes, or special certificates or diplomas for ELLs who do not pass the high school exit exam, and Minnesota has no special program or assistance specifically aimed at helping ELL students pass the exit exam.

Support Policies

Minnesota Rule 3501.0110 requires school districts to provide remediation and establish a remediation plan for any student who has yet to pass the Basic Skills Test in reading by the end of tenth grade. Students are not required, however, to attend remediation programs. Minnesota did not indicate that it targets any funds on remediation for students, nor has it supported professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the BSTs. The state has developed information guides explaining the tests but no remediation programs or materials to help students prepare for the exam.

Monitoring

There are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004-05

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Written Composition
All students	74%	85%	91%
Male	76%	84%	88%
Female	73%	86%	95%
White	81%	90%	95%
Black	35%	56%	70%
Hispanic	46%	64%	73%
Asian	64%	76%	81%
Native American	47%	67%	83%
English language learners/ LEP	40%	55%	57%
Free or reduced-price lunch	52%	69%	79%
Students with disabilities	33%	49%	64%

Cumulative Pass Rates in 2004

The cumulative pass rates for all students are as follows:

Math	99.1%
Reading	99.6%
Written Composition	99.5%

Cumulative pass rates are calculated by dividing the number of twelfth graders who had taken the test by the July 2004 retest but did not pass it by the total number of students enrolled in the twelfth grade in 2004. State data on passing scores disaggregated for various subgroups of students are not currently available.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates below are calculated by dividing the total number of students graduating in 2003 by the sum of:

- the number of students who dropped out of grade 9 in 1999-2000;
- the number of students who dropped out of grade 10 in 2000-01;
- the number of students who dropped out of grade 11 in 2001-02;
- the number of students who dropped out of grade 12 in 2002-03; and
- the number of 2003 graduates.

Graduation Rates for 2003 (based on the student cohort in grade 9 in 1999-2000)

Subgroups	Rate
All students	87.6%
Male	NA
Female	NA
White	91.8%
Black	60.5%
Hispanic	50.8%
Asian	83.7%
American Indian	58.1%
English language learners/LEP	65.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch	76.1%
Students with disabilities	80.0%

Higher Education

Results of the Basic Skills Tests are not used to make decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. If students do not receive a diploma because they did not pass the BST, they can still be admitted to a public community college by earning a GED or through an individual evaluation of their potential. Students can be admitted to public universities as an exception to the normal requirement by meeting other rigid criteria for college admissions. State K-12 education officials have not had discussions with higher education officials about linking the content of the BSTs to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program. However, in response to reports that a “significant number” of Minnesota high school students are not prepared for post-secondary education, the governor proposed a new College Readiness–Get Ready initiative in 2005. Through this initiative, the state department of education will pay for students to take the ACT Explore Tests in grade 8 and the ACT Plan Test at grade 10. These tests are linked to the ACT college admission test and will allow students, teachers, schools, and parents to determine college readiness earlier than the junior or senior year of high school. This initiative was also contained in the education appropriations bill, so it was not clear as of press time whether it would be funded.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, May 2005.

Mississippi

Test Name: Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program

Subjects Tested: Algebra I, biology I, English II, and U.S. history from 1877

Initial Grade Tested: Varies

Test Type: End-of-course

Stated Purpose of the Exam

In 1999, the Mississippi Senate approved the Mississippi Student Achievement Act, which states that standards for high school graduation shall include student “mastery of minimum academic skills as measured by assessments developed and administered by the State Board of Education.”

Historical and Policy Background

The Functional Literacy Exam (FLE), a minimum competency exam, first became a graduation requirement in the mid-1980s. The state is in the last stage of phasing out the FLE and has replaced it with four end-of course exams, the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP). In 2003, diplomas were first withheld from students who did not pass the new SATP.

The state reports that there have been no major policy changes since the new tests were authorized, nor are there plans to replace the SATP at this time.

Test Characteristics

The SATP exit exams are administered in August (online), October (online retest), October (standard paper-and-pencil writing assessment), December (paper-and-pencil administration and retest), March (online retest and paper-and-pencil writing assessment), and April (paper-and-pencil administration and senior online retest). The state considers the SATP to be an end-of-course exam aligned with the content of courses taught at various grade levels. The tests were developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company.

The state reports that the tests have undergone review by external reviewers to determine their alignment with standards and to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exams.

The SATP assesses algebra I, biology I, English II (with a writing component), and U.S. history from 1877. Beginning in August 2005, the four main tests will consist only of multiple-choice items. The English II subject area test includes three sections: a multiple-choice section and two writing assessments (a narrative writing prompt and an informative writing prompt). The tests are not timed. All students are allowed to use calculators on the algebra I test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the SATP to receive diplomas, unless they transfer to and plan to graduate from a public school.

NCLB

The algebra I and English II test results are used to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act for students in grades 10-12. The results from students who took the test for the first time count for NCLB purposes. Standards were set for biology I and U.S. history from 1877 in November 2004. The cut score for graduation purposes was set at 300 for both of these subjects. The score range for proficient performance for NCLB purposes is 335 and above for biology and 347 and above for U.S. history.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees who have been trained extensively in Mississippi's scoring rubrics grade the open-ended questions on the exam. Beginning with the August 2005 administration, the tests will no longer have open-ended questions. These items will be replaced with two to four additional multiple-choice items. The tests are scored on a scale of 100-500, and students must score 300 on each subject area test to pass. Results are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents about two and one-half months after testing. Combined summary results are reported to the public annually at the end of the summer. Student reports include information about the student's pass/fail status, proficiency levels, scaled scores, and subscores for each objective tested. Sample test questions are released in guides for students and parents and are posted on the Internet and in public libraries in Mississippi.

Student Options

Students are permitted up to five opportunities a year to retake the exit exam. In 2004-05, tests were administered in August, October, December, March, and April. Students who fail the initial test can begin retaking the exam at the next administration. If students have not met the exit exam requirement but have met all other graduation requirements by the end of grade 12, they can retake the exam for as long as they need to, without any age limit. The state does not collect information on pass rates for students retaking the test.

The state permits transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Mississippi. If a transfer student passes a course equivalent to one of the courses tested and is granted credit for this course by the new school, the student is exempted from taking the test. If a student fails a subject area test twice, he or she can appeal for a substitute evaluation (which typically relies on other evidence such as passing grades in the course to demonstrate student's mastery of the subject). Mississippi does not have information on the percentage of general education students who requested a substitute evaluation, although state officials estimate a very small number of students have chosen this route. The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data, but it has not analyzed the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the exam.

There are no other waivers for general education students who fail the SATP, but students who do not receive a regular diploma can receive a certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or alternate or occupational diploma. Students may also choose to earn their GED and continue to take the exit exam. If they earn their GED and then pass the SATP, they are granted a regular diploma.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows an expansive list of accommodations for students with disabilities (see <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/section5.pdf>). These include, but are not limited to, extended time, scheduled rest breaks, individual or small group administration, special settings, reading aloud of directions and test items to students, use of magnification or low vision aids for visually impaired students, use of scribes, and use of a tape recorder to document student answers. In addition, the state has developed exit exams and related materials in Braille and large print. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using allowable accommodations receive a regular high school diploma. Students with

disabilities who do not pass the exit exam can receive a certificate of completion or occupational diploma, or they can take an alternative test called the High Stakes Alternative Assessment. The High Stakes Alternative Assessment is used to assess students for whom an accurate measure of performance and progress cannot be obtained using the standard statewide testing programs, even with appropriate accommodations and modifications. Students with disabilities qualify for the alternative assessment if they are pursuing a regular high school diploma but would need an unallowable testing accommodation in order to take the general assessment.

English Language Learners

The state allows accommodations on the SATP for English language learners, such as the use of translating word-to-word dictionaries or spelling dictionaries. These are not the same set of accommodations allowed for other statewide testing programs, since accommodations vary based on the nature and subject of the test. ELL students who pass exit exams with allowable accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for a short time. Mississippi does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English II subject area test to receive a diploma. The state does not offer the SATP in languages other than English. There are no special certificates for ELLs who do not pass the high school exit exam except those afforded to all students. The state administers grants programs to help children develop proficiency in English and help them pass the exit exam.

Support Policies

If students fail an exit exam, the state recommends that districts make available remediation opportunities. The state has also provided all districts with curriculum intervention guides and supplements for courses in all four tested subjects. Districts have also received general guidelines about optional remediation opportunities and future test dates, but the state requires no mandatory remediation process. Mississippi did not indicate on the Center's survey that it targets any funds on remediation for students.

The state has established and supported specific professional development programs to help teachers understand how to interpret test results and familiarize teachers with test specifications, the test blueprint, classroom strategies, and the content of the state high school exit exams. The state has also developed materials that correlate the assessment to the curriculum and informational guides especially for teachers. For students, the state has developed computer-based programs, study guides, informational booklets, a CD-ROM for practice tests, and Web resources.

Monitoring

In addition to NCLB accountability, the state has its own accountability system that uses students' pass rates on the SATP as a factor in determining a school's performance level. The system rewards superior-performing or exemplary schools (the top two levels). Schools that fall into the lowest performance level (priority) are targeted for additional oversight and professional development opportunities.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2003-04

Subgroups	Math	English II			Science	Social Studies
		Reading/ Lang. Arts	Writing Narrative Prompt	Writing In- formative Prompt		
All students	90.7%	83.1%	84.9%	89.2%	89.2%	95.7%
Male	89.9%	80.1%	83.5%	85.8%	89.9%	96.0%*
Female	91.4%	85.4%	86.1%	92.3%	88.6%	94.8%
White	95.7%	91.8%	88.1%	92.4%	96.0%*	96.2%
Black	84.9%	73.5%	81.2%	85.6%	81.1%	92.8%
Hispanic	95.8%	83.3%	89.2%	94.6%	89.9%	96.0%*
Asian	96.0%*	84.8%	91.1%	95.3%	95.5%	96.0%*
Native American	96.0%*	85.7%	86.1%	94.4%	80.6%	93.3%
English language learners/LEP	89.1%	53.8%	96.0%*	96.0%*	71.4%	86.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch	86.0%	74.5%	80.8%	86.0%	82.2%	92.8%
Students with disabilities	73.3%	44.1%	68.0%	73.2%	72.0%	85.8%

* Percentages 96 through 100 are reflected in this table as 96.0%.

Note: The English II SATP consists of three sections, and students must pass all three to meet graduation requirements.

Cumulative Pass Rates

Data on cumulative pass rates are not available at the state level at this time.

Graduation Rates

The state reports that 81.3% of the 1999-2000 high school cohort graduated in 2002-03. Data disaggregated by gender, race, and other characteristics are not available at the state level. The graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of graduates for 2003 by the adjusted enrollment. Adjusted enrollment is derived by starting with the grade 9 enrollees for the cohort; adding all students who transfer into the cohort during each school year between grades 9 and 12; subtracting all students who transfer out of the cohort during each school year between grades 9 and 12; adding or subtracting, as appropriate, the difference between the year-end grade 9 membership and the grade 10 enrollees the next school year, and repeating this step for each year of the cohort; adding any students who transferred out but re-enter during a school year; and subtracting any students who fail grade 12.

Higher Education

Results of the SATP are not used to make decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. Students can be admitted into a public community college if they have a GED, but they cannot be admitted into a public university without a diploma. State K-12 education officials have not yet had discussions with higher education officials about linking the content of the SATP to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Nevada

Test Name: High School Proficiency Examination
Subjects Tested: Math, reading, writing, and science
Initial Grade Tested: 10
Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official purpose of Nevada's exit exam, according to the state legislation authorizing the exam, is to ensure that all students receiving a regular diploma in Nevada have met the same level of performance in the core subjects of reading, writing, and math. Science will be included starting in 2008 for 10th grade students only.

Historical and Policy Background

Nevada Revised Statutes section 389.015 authorizes the use of the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE) as the high school exit exam. The exam was first based on the 1994 state course of study. In 1999 the exam was realigned to be consistent with the Nevada content standards adopted in August 1998. Science was added in 2001, but in 2003 the legislature delayed counting the science test as a graduation requirement until the graduating class of 2009. Passing scores were set in 2001 for the HSPE reading and math tests. In 2003 the minimum passing score in math was changed temporarily to make it two standard deviations below the recommended cut score, with the provision that by 2007 it would be returned to the previous level of one standard deviation below the recommend cut score. According to information collected by CEP, Nevada has no end-of-course exams that serve as exit exams, nor does the state currently have any plans to replace the HSPE.

A unique state-level student identification number was implemented in 2005 for all students. This number permits the state to track the performance of individual students.

Test Characteristics

The HSPE is administered in February, March/April, July, and November. The state considers the HSPE to be a standards-based exam aligned to state standards for grades 8-12. The exam was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The state has a contract with a testing company to have teachers in the state draft items for the test. The testing company produces test forms, and it scans, scores, and reports the results.

The HSPE tests math, reading, writing, and science. The exam consists of multiple-choice and writing prompt/essay questions. It is designed to last 90 minutes per subject, but students can request more time if they need it. Only students who are allowed accommodations can use calculators on the math test.

The state does not require home-schooled students to take or pass the HSPE to get a diploma, but if they want to become eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship program, they must take the test and achieve a passing score.

NCLB

Nevada began using the results from the HSPE to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2003-04. The results from a student's initial testing and first retest are counted for NCLB purposes. The science test will also be used for NCLB purposes beginning in 2007-08. The state uses the same cut scores for NCLB proficiency as it uses to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

The performance levels for the graduation exam are exceeds standard, meets standard, approaching standard, and developing/emergent. The tests are scored on a scale of 100-500, and students must achieve a scaled score of 300 in each subject area tested. The score ranges for the performance levels could change from year to year. Scores are reported to the district 28 days after test administration. Districts are required to report scores to schools 15 days after receiving them from the testing contractor. Scores are also released publicly after each administration. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed and showing their scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area. The questions from the exit exams are not released.

When students fail an exam, the state or district must provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.

Student Options

Students have six opportunities to retake the exam before the end of grade 12. Students can retake the exams in April of the year after they first took it. If students have not passed the exit exam but have met the other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam after the twelfth grade, with no limit on age, and receive a diploma. The state does not report data on the number of students who choose this option, nor does the state report the number of times that students take each section of the exam. There is no limit to how many times a student can retake the exam. The state does not offer any alternate routes to a regular diploma if students do not pass the exit exam, but students can receive a certificate of completion or attendance. The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other state exams to meet graduation requirements in Nevada. According to information provided to CEP, the state has no process for general education students who fail the exit exam to request a waiver from the exam requirement.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations while taking the HSPE, but those who pass the exam using accommodations will not receive a regular high school diploma. The state issues an adjusted diploma for students with disabilities who have met the graduation requirements specified in their IEP but have not passed the HSPE or who have passed it with accommodations.

Nevada offers a wide range of accommodations that may be written into the student's IEP or section 504 plan. The state provides lists of allowable accommodations each year in the Nevada Guidelines for Test Administration. These include more time on tests, individual or small group administration, use of calculators (only if specified in the IEP), dictionaries and glossaries, oral administration of the exam (except the reading comprehension component), and others. The state also produces support materials and tests in Braille and large print.

English Language Learners

Students who are English language learners are allowed to use accommodations while taking the HSPE. These may include extra assessment time, breaks during testing, test administration in several sessions, small-group administration, use of dictionaries and glossaries, oral administration of the exam or exam instructions in English or the native language, and others. Students who pass the exit exam using accommodations will not receive a regular high school diploma.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency, or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for too short a time, or for any other reason. The state does not offer the exit exam in languages other than English and does not report having an official

policy on the need for English language competency. Nevertheless, competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English language arts section of the exit exam to receive a diploma. The state does not have targeted programs or special assistance to help English language learners pass the exit exam.

The accommodations provided to students with disabilities and English language learners on the exit exam are the same as those allowed for these subgroups for all statewide tests.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remedial services for students who do not pass the HSPE, but students are not required to attend these programs. School districts are required to make these programs available to students who have failed the exam twice.

The state has not supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the exit exam, nor has the state developed materials related to the exams for teachers. Study guides for students have been developed.

In addition, the state has supported the development of a new computer-based teaching and remediation aid called the Visual Math Dictionary for high school mathematics. Nevada is in the process of introducing this product to school districts, schools, and teachers.

For the 2003-04 school year, the state has committed \$873,979 for students who fail the exit exam. This funding is targeted at grades 11-12 and is only available to high schools in which 95% of their students participate in the exit exam.

The state has developed a variety of supports for students who are preparing for or retaking the exams. For example, the state has supported the development of a computer-based math remediation program by local businesses and the development of online remediation programs by the Clark County School District. In addition, the state produces a review guide for the HSPE and has restructured the testing program to enable the release of test forms starting September 1, 2005.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exam.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers, Grade 10

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition
All students	48.4%	70.0%	83.4%
Male	49.3%	66.4%	80.2%
Female	47.4%	73.8%	87.1%
White	60.2%	79.9%	89.3%
Black	27.0%	53.1%	75.4%
Hispanic	29.2%	54.2%	72.1%
Asian	58.7%	75.4%	86.4%
Native American	35.6%	65.8%	83.7%
English language learners/LEP	16.6%	29.2%	65.2%
Free or reduced-price lunch	31.4%	55.2%	76.1%
Students with disabilities	7.9%	24.5%	48.9%
Migrant	26.3%	52.6%	50.0%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The state reports that the cumulative pass rate in school year 2002-03 was 88.9%. This rate is calculated by dividing the number of students receiving standard and adult diplomas by the number of students receiving standard, adult, or adjusted diplomas plus the number receiving certificates of attendance.

Graduation Rates

In 2002-03, the state reported the following data regarding graduation rates. The state did not disaggregate data for the performance of English language learners in 2002-2003. The state uses the definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics to calculate the graduation rate.

All students	74.8%
Male	73.1%
Female	76.4%
White	80.6%
Black	59.6%
Hispanic	62.8%
Asian	80.9%
Native American	69.2%

Higher Education

Public universities and community colleges do not use the HSPE for admissions decisions or course placement. In 1999, however, the governor and legislature created the Nevada Millennium Scholarship, which is open to students who pass all areas of the HSPE and earn at least a 3.1 grade point average based on all high school credit-granting courses. (The GPA requirement will rise to 3.25 for those in the classes of 2007 and beyond.) The scholarship has additional requirements (see <http://nevadatreasurer.gov/documents/Millennium/2005%20FACT%20SHEET.pdf>), and can be used to attend any institution within the University and Community College System of Nevada (UCCSN) or Sierra Nevada College. The dollar value of the Millennium Scholarship is determined on a per-credit basis and depends on the type of institution attended; scholars will receive between \$40 and \$80 per enrolled credit hour for a maximum of \$10,000.

The state reports that it has not had discussions with higher education officials about linking the content of the HSPE to standards for what students need to know to enter college. Some citizens in the state also want the HSPE to serve as an entrance exam for the state university and community college system. The state department leadership is reviewing the feasibility of using the HPSE for this purpose.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examination as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and verified by the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

New Jersey

Test Name: High School Proficiency Assessment
Subjects Tested: Language arts literacy and mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 11
Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

According to the law authorizing the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), the exam “shall measure those basic skills all students must possess to function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society.” Additionally, the 2004 Core Curriculum Content Standards, to which the HSPA is aligned, define “what all students should know and be able to do at the end of thirteen years of public education.”

Historical and Policy Background

In 1998, the New Jersey legislature passed legislation (N.J.S.A. 18A: 7C-6.2) that requires all students who graduate from a public high school in New Jersey to pass a state exam in order to graduate. New Jersey replaced the original exam, the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11), with the HSPA. Students who were in the eleventh grade in 2000 were the last cohort required to take the HSPT11 to graduate.

The state began administering the new standards-based exam, the HSPA, to eleventh graders in 2002. The graduating class of 2003 was the first required to pass this new exam. The HSPA represents a set of policy changes to the previous high school exit exam, arising from the establishment of state core curriculum standards in 1996 and the development of an exit exam aligned to those standards. The state has no plans to replace HSPA at this time.

Test Characteristics

The HSPA is administered in March of the eleventh grade with retests in October. The state considers the HSPA to be a standards-based exam aligned to the grade 11 state standards. The exam was developed by the state in collaboration with New Jersey field educators and testing vendors. The state indicates that the content of the exam is reviewed continuously for alignment with state standards by content committees of field educators and that an external review by was done by Achieve, Inc.

The High School Proficiency Assessment tests language arts literacy and math and will include science in 2007. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The HSPA language arts literacy test is given over a two-day period. On the first day, testing lasts two hours and 25 minutes, and on the second day, testing lasts two hours and 55 minutes. The HSPA math test is given in one day, and in 2005, it was expanded from two hours and 25 minutes to three hours and 16 minutes for the same basic content and number of items. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the HSPA to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The results of the first administration of the HSPA in grade 11 in language arts literacy and math count for determining adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. The science test results will count in 2007. The state uses the same cut score for NCLB proficiency as it does to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

Trained scorers with college degrees, employed by the HSPA contractor, grade the open-ended questions on the high school exit exam. The performance levels for the High School Proficiency Assessment are partially proficient, proficient, and advanced proficient. The tests are scored on a scale of 100-300, and students must score 200 in each subject to pass. Scores of 100-199 are partially proficient, 200-249 are proficient, and 250-300 are advanced proficient.

The results are reported to districts, schools, and parents three months after testing and to the public approximately four months after testing. Reports include information about whether the student passes or fails, as well as scores and subscores of skills and content under each major subject area. Some of the test questions and sample student responses are released each year. Samples are included in the student/teacher/parent guide developed each year, and the test specifications and sample tests are posted on the state department of education website. Selected writing prompts are released each year, along with sample student responses, in a writing handbook made public as part of the score reporting.

The state or district is required to provide students who fail the exit exam with information to help them with future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking. For example, students may need information to help them determine whether their remaining coursework should be directed to areas of possible weakness or altered to make time for remedial classes to help them pass the exit exam the next time. There is no standard format for providing this information.

The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have two opportunities to retake the exam by the end of grade 12, and students who are retained have additional opportunities. The first retest option is in October of the twelfth grade. The state reports that it has information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the HSPA. If students meet all of the other requirements to graduate except passing the HSPA, they can retake the exam after the twelfth grade; however, the state does not collect information on pass rates for those students. The state currently does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in New Jersey.

If students fail to attain proficiency (a score of 200 or above) on one or both sections of the HSPA, they can also go through a Special Review Assessment (SRA) process, which allows students to demonstrate their mastery of the required skills on the HSPA. A team of educators, after examining other evidence, determines whether the student has mastered enough of the required skills to achieve the equivalent of a passing score on the HSPA. If students have fulfilled all of the course requirements for graduation but failed to pass the HSPA, they can continue with any one of the following options:

- Continue the SRA process
- Return to the school at testing time the following year and take the HSPA
- Pass the GED tests

In 2004, 18% of general education students who failed the HSPA used the SRA process. In August of 2005, the state board adopted a policy to start phasing out the SRA beginning with the freshman class of 2006-07. A debate continues about what options should be provided for those students who fail the standard high school exit exam.

No alternate diplomas or certificates are available for general education students who do not pass the HSPA. There are also no waiver or appeals processes in place.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows an extensive list of accommodations for students with disabilities, as specified in their IEPs. These include, but are not limited to, additional time, use of a scribe, reading aloud of directions, reading aloud of items, special seating or lighting arrangements, use of large face calculators, and extra breaks. In addition, the state has developed exit exam materials in Braille and large print. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs.

Some students with disabilities are exempted from passing, but not taking, the HSPA, based on their locally determined IEP. Students who are designated as "IEP-exempt" must take the exempt portions of the test at least once, but the scores will not affect their graduation status. Students with severe disabilities take the Alternate Proficiency Assessment instead of the HSPA and can earn a regular diploma if they fulfill all other requirements for high school graduation.

Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations and who meet the requirements of their IEPs still receive a regular high school diploma. There are no special diplomas for students who do not meet the graduation requirements of the state or their IEPs.

English Language Learners

The state allows students identified as limited English proficient to use accommodations on the exams, such as extra time, a small group testing environment, translated directions, and use of bilingual dictionaries. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. English language learners are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for a short time. New Jersey does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the language arts literacy section of the exit exam to graduate. Consequently, the state does not offer the HSPA in languages other than English, although ELL students may undergo the Special Review Assessment process in Spanish, Russian, and Gujarati.

English language learners may demonstrate proficiency in the required content areas by completing the SRA process in the above-mentioned languages or in English. To be eligible for an SRA in the native language, an English language learner must have scored below the state-established cutoff score on one of the state-approved English language tests and have either (1) participated in a bilingual, ESL, or English Language Services program for two consecutive years or less before the date of the HSPA testing; or (2) attended school in the United States for three consecutive years or less before the date of the HSPA.

English language learners who take the SRA in English or another language must also pass an English fluency test in order to receive a high school diploma. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma. There are no appeals or waiver processes or special certificates or diplomas for ELLs who do not pass the high school exit exam. Also, New Jersey has no special program or assistance targeted to ELL students to help them pass the exit exam.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the HSPA, and students are required to attend the remediation programs. Funding for these programs is locally determined. Students who do not pass a section of the HSPA must be given a comprehensive assessment and must be provided with supplemental remedial instruction targeted to their individual needs.

The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the HSPA, including training in how to interpret test results and training in test administration. The state has not developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for the exams for students. The state, however, does provide adult high schools, adult literacy support, and funding for GED courses to support students who have failed the exit exam but have met other graduation requirements.

In 2004, the New Jersey Department of Education instituted an intensive pilot summer remedial program that culminates in a special administration of the HSPA. This pilot aims to help appropriate candidates meet the HSPA requirement before their senior year and avoid the SRA process, in order to afford these students the fullest range of twelfth-grade opportunities.

Monitoring

The Comprehensive Education Improvement and Funding Act reinforces the mandate for the Commissioner of Education to develop a process to determine each school district's performance against standards set by the state education department. The law also requires school districts to report annually to the Commissioner on their progress toward meeting these standards and to share this report with the public at a regularly scheduled board meeting. This law also establishes incremental steps of intervention that the Commissioner may invoke when individual schools experience three consecutive years of failure.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts
All students	70.0%	82.2%
Male	71.0%	78.4%
Female	69.1%	86.3%
White	81.0%	89.9%
Black	38.7%	65.4%
Hispanic	48.6%	65.6%
Asian	86.8%	88.0%
Native American	72.0%	79.3%
English language learners/LEP	29.3%	24.2%
Free or reduced-price lunch	43.1%	61.2%
Students with disabilities	26.8%	40.8%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The cumulative pass rate in 2004 was 73%. This is the percentage of students who were in grade 11 in March 2003 and had received passing scores in both test content areas by March 2004, excluding students who were IEP-exempted from passing and those who took the Alternate Proficiency Assessment for students with severe disabilities.

Graduation Rates

The state reports that 91% of the 1999-2000 high school cohort graduated in 2002-03. (The state did not report data disaggregated by gender, race, and other characteristics.) The graduation rate provides an estimate for the cohort of students that began high school four years ago. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduated during a given school year or the summer after that school year by the total of (a) the number of school-year and summer graduates described above; and (b) the number of students in the cohort who dropped out in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The result is then multiplied by 100 to get the graduation rate in percentage terms.

Higher Education

HSPA scores are not used in making decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. The state education department reports that it has not had conversations with higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

New Mexico

Test Name: New Mexico High School Competency Examination

Subjects Tested: Reading, English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and composition

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Minimum competency

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official state position on the purpose of the exit exam is laid out in the law authorizing the exam. The law states, "A student shall not receive a high school diploma who has not passed a state graduation examination in the subject areas of English language arts, reading, mathematics, science, social science, and composition. The state graduation examination on social science shall include a section on the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of New Mexico. If a student exits from the school system at the end of grade twelve without having passed a state examination, he shall receive an appropriate state certificate indicating the number of credits earned and the grade completed. If within five years after a student exits from the school system he takes and passes the state graduation examination, he may receive a high school diploma."

Historical and Policy Background

New Mexico Statutes 1978 Chapter 22-2-8.4—Graduation Requirements authorize the use of a graduation exam as part of the high school requirements. New Mexico has been administering the New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) since 1987-88. Students in the class of 1990 were the first who had to pass all subtests of this exam to receive a diploma and graduate.

A new standards-based high school exam, the New Mexico High School Standards Assessment (NMHSSA) is being phased in for the purpose of complying with the accountability requirements of NCLB. It was first administered in November 2003 but is not yet a graduation requirement. The NMHSSA currently has subtests in reading and math. Subtests in language arts and social studies will become operational in 2006-07, and a science subtest will become operational in 2007-08. Dr. Veronica C. García, the state secretary of education, has unveiled a plan for the NMHSSA to replace the NMHSCE as the high school exit exam in 2009-10, in order to allow for adequate prior notice. The Public Education Department has engaged in initial discussions with stakeholders about the options for using the NMHSSA as a high school exit exam.

Test Characteristics

The NMHSCE is administered in January of grade 10, with retests in November for seniors and those who have exited grade 12. Grade 10 students who have not passed all subtests are retested in January of grade 11 and twice in grade 12. The state considers the exam to be a minimum competency exam, and it is not intended to be aligned to state standards. Consequently, no alignment review has been conducted. The exam was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company.

The New Mexico High School Competency Examination tests reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and composition. The test consists of multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay, and extended-performance task questions. The NMHSCE is an untimed exam. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

The state does not require home-schooled or private school students to pass the exam to receive a diploma.

NCLB

The current New Mexico High School Competency Examination will not be used for NCLB accountability. Instead, results from the newer exam, the New Mexico High School Standards Assessment, are used to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The first use of NMHSSA results for adequate yearly progress under NCLB was in 2003-2004. When the NMHSSA is adopted as an exit examination, it will continue to be used for accountability reporting purposes under NCLB.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees score the open-ended questions on the NMHSCE. The performance levels for the NMHSCE are pass and fail. The tests are scored on a scale of approximately 300 points depending on the particular forms used each year. Students must score 175 in each subject and reach a holistic score of 3 on the composition subtest in order to pass. The passing score was changed from 150 to 175 for grade 10 students in spring 2001. The results are reported to districts and schools two months after testing, and the district then decides when to report scores to students and parents. Results are reported to the public when the district decides. Reports include information on whether students pass or fail and their subject area scores, subscores of skills and content under each major subject area, and scores on individual test items. Test questions and sample student responses on the exam are not released each year.

Student Options

Students can retake the exam in the spring of grade 11 and have three opportunities to retake the exam by the end of grade 12. They also have two retake opportunities a year for the five years after they exit grade 12. The state currently allows transfer students to submit passing scores from all other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in New Mexico. The state does not allow students to submit scores from alternate tests to replace the state's exit exam.

The state allows districts to grant waivers. The waiver or appeals process must be initiated by the school or district and referred to the local school board. If approved by the school board, the district superintendent sends information to the state secretary of education for review and approval. Districts issue certificates of completion for students who do not receive a regular diploma but have met other graduation requirements. The state does not report data on the number of general education students who are granted waivers.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows students with disabilities to use accommodations, such as different modes of presentation, response, setting, or timing and scheduling of the assessment. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Students with severe cognitive disabilities who meet the state's eligibility criteria may take the New Mexico Alternate Assessment in place of the exit exam. Students with disabilities can also receive a regular diploma by going through a career readiness program of study or an ability program of study. In the career readiness program, the student must take the New Mexico High School Competency Exam and meet a competency level determined by the IEP team. In an ability program, the student must take either the NMHSCE or the New Mexico Alternate Assessment and meet a competency level determined by the IEP team.

Like other students, students with disabilities who exit the school system at the end of grade 12 without having passed the exit exam receive a certificate of completion indicating the number of credits earned and the grade completed.

Students are also provided with a variety of accommodations to assist them in taking the exams. For example, the state permits accommodations in the areas of timing, scheduling and setting. All changes in setting (such as individual administration in a study carrel) or in timing or scheduling (such as allowing more breaks that do not permit sharing of information) are considered adaptations of a standardized administration. These do not need to be documented, and they are not marked as accommodations on the test. Other adaptations include the use of assistive devices (pencil grips, magnifiers, etc.), use of place markers for both presentation and response, and allowing students to mark responses in the test booklet.

The state also permits presentation and response accommodations, such as reading aloud of the test directions only in reading and of all test material in other content areas; use of a scribe to mark, write, or translate responses; paraphrasing of test directions; use of manipulatives for math assessments; and use of signing or pointing to indicate responses.

These same accommodations are permitted on all state-mandated assessments in New Mexico. Full information about accommodations may be found in the state's Procedures Manual (<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/assess/dtc.training.site.html>).

English Language Learners

The state allows students identified as limited English proficient to use accommodations on the exams. Students in this subgroup who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Spanish-speaking students also have the option of taking a Spanish-language version of the exit exam. In addition, they are eligible for the same waiver and certificate options as general education students. The state does not exempt English language learners from the exam because they lack English competency or have been enrolled for a limited amount of time in U.S. schools.

English language learners may take advantage of any accommodations provided to students with disabilities. Examples of presentation and response accommodations more likely to be used by ELL students, according to the state, include oral translation of test material (test directions only for reading, all material for other content areas); use of word-to-word translation dictionaries; and use of a scribe to translate the student's oral response from a language other than English into the test book. The state does not offer programs or special assistance targeted to ELL students to help them pass the exam.

The New Mexico Constitution strongly promotes bilingualism in education and the rights of native Spanish speakers. The exit exam is offered in both English and Spanish, and students can pass all subtests in Spanish in order to receive a diploma.

Support Policies

The state does not require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the NMHSCE, nor are students required to attend remedial programs. The state has not supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the NMHSCE. The state did not indicate that it has developed materials for teachers or preparation and remediation programs and materials for the exams for students. The state reports developing assessments in Braille, large print, and Spanish.

Monitoring

There are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exam.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers, 2004-05

Subgroups	Math	Reading	Writing Comp- osition	Science	Social Studies	Language Arts	All Six Subtests
All students	78.2%	86.2%	96.8%	75.1%	71.9%	76.3%	58.4%
Male	78.8%	84.4%	95.5%	76.8%	73.8%	70.1%	59.3%
Female	77.7%	88.3%	98.2%	73.6%	70.3%	82.7%	57.8%
White	89.7%	94.2%	98.5%	89.9%	86.6%	87.8%	77.7%
Black	67.0%	82.1%	95.9%	67.0%	63.4%	67.5%	47.0%
Hispanic	73.7%	83.3%	96.3%	68.7%	65.3%	71.7%	49.8%
Asian	91.7%	93.0%	98.3%	84.3%	82.9%	87.0%	73.0%
Native American	66.7%	77.4%	94.3%	61.8%	58.7%	65.8%	39.8%
English language learners/LEP	65.8%	75.8%	93.4%	57.7%	54.7%	62.4%	36.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch	71.8%	80.9%	95.1%	66.7%	64.1%	68.9%	47.4%
Students with disabilities	41.7%	54.7%	86.1%	43.0%	42.1%	35.9%	20.8%

The state notes that these pass rates are for all grade 10 students taking the exam for the first time, including students who took the test with accommodations.

Cumulative Pass Rates

New Mexico does not currently report cumulative pass rates at the state level. However, New Mexico has implemented a statewide student identifier in the 2004-05 school year, which will provide the capacity for tracking cumulative pass rates in the future.

Graduation Rates

The state reports the following graduation data for the 2004 cohort of grade 12 students:

All students	89%
Male	NA
Female	NA
White	91%
Black	93%
Hispanic	89%
Asian	91%
Native American	81%
English language learners/LEP	73%
Free or reduced price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	78%

The graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of graduates by the number of students enrolled on the 40th day of the school year, with matching of individual student data.

This is an interim measure of the graduation rate, approved as part of New Mexico's accountability workbook until 2008, when a cohort graduation rate can be calculated based on implementation of a unique statewide student identifier. In the interim, the Public Education Department will be implementing and reporting graduation progress reports (based on the percentage of ninth grade students

who begin and end the tenth grade school year) and partial cohort rates (based on the percentage of students who start grade 11 and graduate by the end of grade 12). The unique statewide student identifier was implemented during school year 2004-2005.

Higher Education

According to the Center's 2003 study of high school exit exams, the state universities in New Mexico do not require a diploma for admission, but students cannot receive financial aid without a diploma or GED. Some of the universities use exit exam scores for course placement, and others do not. Most community colleges do not use the scores for admissions but they may use them for course placement decisions. All community colleges admit students holding a GED, and some allow students to take classes for two years while attaining a GED. Some community colleges allow students to take classes without a diploma or GED, but students still must have one or the other to receive financial aid or a degree.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not currently have end-of-course assessments in high school. However, the New Mexico Public Education Department has received an appropriation from the legislature for FY 2006 to develop and pilot end-of-course exams in mathematics.

The state does not report having any college readiness exams.

Over the years, state K-12 education and higher education officials have held discussions about linking the content of the state's exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college. Education reform legislation passed in 2003 required the high school curricula to be aligned to the placement tests used by institutions of higher education. In 2005, there was an unsuccessful attempt to require standardized placement exams for all public higher education institutions in the state and allow these exams to be administered to students in grade 11. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to replace the current high school exit exam with the New Mexico High School Standards Assessment, and a push to use the NMHSSA results to provide remediation to students before they left high school, to prepare them better for college courses.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

New York

Test Name: Regents Comprehensive examinations
Subjects Tested: English, mathematics, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and science
Initial Grade Tested: Varies
Test Type: End-of-course

Stated Purpose of the examination

The official purpose of the state's exit examination, according to New York officials, is examination "to measure students' achievement of the State learning standards in the five subject areas required for graduation from high school."

Historical and Policy Background

The New York State Board of Regents approved new graduation requirements in 1996 that revised the Regents examinations, which are end-of-course tests. Before 1996, the state administered Regents examinations to students pursuing a Regents-endorsed diploma and administered a minimum competency examination to all students called the Regents Competency Tests. The class of 2000 was the first graduating class that took the revised Regents examinations. These students had to pass only the English subject test in order to graduate. Since the class of 2003, students must pass five Regents examinations to graduate: comprehensive English, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and one of the following sciences: physical setting: earth science; living environment; physical setting: chemistry; and physical setting: physics. Students take the examinations when they complete coursework.

In October 2003, the Board of Regents agreed to wait three more years before raising the passing scores on state graduation tests. The board also decided to postpone until 2009 a requirement that students with disabilities pass the same examinations at the same score.

The state changed the format and content of the Mathematics A exam beginning with the January 2004 test administration. Since that time, revisions have been made to the math standard and coordinating adjustments will be made to the math Regents examinations. Pending action of the Board of Regents, an additional mathematics Regents examination may be added. In September 2004, the state approved additional alternate tests to Regents examinations in Mathematics B and global history and geography.

Test Characteristics

Regents examinations are administered in January, June, and August each year. The state considers the examinations to be both standards-based and end-of-course examinations that are aligned to the Commencement Level (grades 9-12) of the New York State Learning Standards. The examinations were developed by the state. In addition to students in public school, students in accredited private schools must also pass the examinations to receive a diploma. Home-schooled students are not required to take the exams.

The state has reviewed the exit examinations to determine whether they are aligned to state standards. External reviews have also been conducted by ETS and a technical advisory group of national experts. The state has performed standards implementation studies to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the examinations.

The Regents examinations assess student performance in English, math, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and science. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer,

writing prompt/essay, and extended performance task questions. Currently the Regents examination in physical science: earth science includes extended performance tasks. Typically, students take the physical setting: earth science Regents examination to fulfill the science requirement because it is the first science course and examination offered. Students must satisfactorily complete a 1,200-minute laboratory requirement before they can take the science Regents examination to meet their science requirement.

The tests last 180 minutes each, and the English test has two parts at 180 minutes each. All students are also required to use at least a scientific calculator on the Mathematics A Regents examination.

NCLB

New York began using the final retest opportunity of the Regents examinations to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002-03. The science examination will also be used for NCLB accountability in 2007-08. The state is using the same achievement level for NCLB proficiency as it is for awarding high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

Teachers score the Regents examination. The performance levels for the examination are pass with distinction (85-100), pass (65-84), and low pass (55-64). Students must achieve a passing grade of 65 on a required Regents examination to earn a Regents diploma. Students who first entered grade 9 in or after September 2001 and before September 2005 and who scored at the low pass level (55-64) may be considered to have passed any Regents examination required for graduation and may receive a local diploma if the school district, at its discretion, offers the low pass option.

Scores are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents immediately after the test. All secondary-level Regents examination are scored by local school districts, which are also responsible for reporting results. Tests must be stored by school districts for at least one year. Students and parents may review student answer sheets under supervision. The questions are released each year to students and posted on the Internet. Copies of the examinations are not returned to the state.

If students fail an exit examination, the districts, as required by their Academic Intervention Services plans, must provide the students with additional instructional support to help them prepare for a future administration of the test.

Student Options

Students have three opportunities each year, until they reach the end of grade 12, to retake the entire Regents examination. Students who fail one of the tests can retake it during the next administration. Certain seniors who fail an examination are eligible to take a Component Retest of the part of the Regents examination that gave them the most difficulty. To date, Component Retests are available in English and math only. Students who are enrolled in school up to age 21 are allowed to retake the exit examination. The state collects pass rates for students who take the examination after twelfth grade and tracks how many times students attempt to pass each section of the examination, but this information was not readily available.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other state examinations to meet the graduation requirement in New York. Students who fail the exit examination are allowed to earn a regular high school diploma by passing an existing substitute test— such as the Advanced Placement, SAT II, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) examinations—that has been approved by the Commissioner of Education as alternatives to some of the Regents examinations. In the 2003-2004 school year, 0.01% of students used the alter-

nate assessment option to fulfill the high school graduation requirement in science, 0.12% used this option in English, 0.02% in math, and 0.01% in social studies. The state does not have a waiver or appeals process for students who fail the examination, and it does not award alternate diplomas or certificates.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows students with disabilities to use approved accommodations contained in the state manual that do not alter the construct being measured. Test versions are available in large type and Braille. Students with disabilities who pass the Regents examinations using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities who first enter grade 9 before September 2010 and who fail the Regents Comprehensive examinations required for graduation but pass the Regents Competency Tests in those subjects may be issued a local diploma. Students with disabilities can also receive an IEP certificate/diploma if they do not pass the Regents Competency Tests or participate in the New York State Alternate Assessment. The IEP certificate/diploma is based on achievement of the IEP goals and objectives.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use certain accommodations on particular Regents examinations. Students can use accommodations relating to optimum testing environment, extended test time, and bilingual dictionaries on all Regents examinations. For the English Regents examination only, ELLs are permitted the additional accommodations of using an English language test proctor and having the listening comprehension passages read three times. For all Regents examinations except English, students who are English language learners can take native language versions in Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Spanish, and Korean or use oral translations of the tests for low-incidence languages; they can also use bilingual glossaries and simultaneously use the English and native language versions of the test. Additionally, students can provide written responses in their native language. There is no exemption for ELL students who have recently enrolled in U.S. schools, and proficiency in English is required to graduate.

English language learners who pass the Regents examination using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests that allow English language learners to receive a regular high school diploma, other than the alternatives allowed for all students. There are also no alternate certificates or diplomas for these students.

Support Services

The state requires school districts to provide remedial services for students who do not pass the high school exit examination. Students who fail Regents examinations are required to receive additional support as part of the school's Academic Intervention Services plan.

State resources are not targeted to school districts based on the numbers of students who fail the exit examination, but are allocated based on need factors outside districts' control. A separate regulation requires school districts to provide academic intervention services to all students who are considered to need extra time and help to meet state learning standards. In the 2003-04 school year, several state aid programs could be used for academic intervention services, including \$705 million in Extraordinary Needs Aid for K-12, \$72.5 million in Educational Related Support Services Aid for K-12, \$86.5 million for K-12 Limited English Proficiency program, \$201 million for Pre-Kindergarten programs, and \$306.4 million for class size reduction in K-3.

The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the Regents examinations, including training teachers how to interpret test results and familiarizing teachers with the content of the Regents examinations. The

state has also developed curriculum guides based on the examinations and information guides explaining the tests. The state has not developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for students.

In 2003-04 school year, the state also provided special assistance targeted to specific populations, such as \$2.15 billion for the excess cost program for students with disabilities in public schools, \$180.5 million for the excess cost program for students with disabilities in private schools, \$4 million for homeless students, \$13 million for incarcerated youth, and \$11.2 million for bilingual students. Districts could use a portion of these funds to help special populations meet the Regents examination requirements.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are school and district accountability rewards linked to student performance on the exit examination. Recognition for high performance includes the following:

- Schools and districts that for two consecutive years achieve all Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) and state standards are recognized as “high performing.” The first schools and districts to be considered high performing were identified using 2002-03 and 2003-04 school year results.
- Schools and districts that do not achieve all AMOs and state standards but make adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, are recognized as “rapidly improving.” The first schools and districts to be considered rapidly improving will be identified using 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 school year results.

The sanctions for schools and districts with low performance on state examinations are those associated with No Child Left Behind.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers

Initial pass rate data are not available.

Cumulative Pass Rates

The information below is for the class of 2004 as of June 30, 2004. It shows the percentage of students scoring 55-100 on Regents examination.

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Science	Social Studies
All students	79.9%	83.4%	86.9%	83.0%
Male	77.5%	80.1%	85.0%	80.7%
Female	82.3%	86.7%	88.7%	85.2%
White	86.6%	89.0%	92.8%	89.3%
Black	63.9%	72.4%	75.3%	70.5%
Hispanic	65.0%	70.4%	72.9%	67.7%
Asian	87.0%	84.8%	88.3%	85.2%
Native American	72.3%	74.4%	79.3%	73.2%
English language learners/LEP	59.9%	52.8%	63.4%	59.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch	68.1%	72.6%	77.2%	72.1%
Students with disabilities	38.4%	46.7%	59.2%	54.2%

The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers to track achievement results.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates below are for the class of 2003, as of August 31, 2003.

All students	76%
Male	72%
Female	80%
White	86%
Black	58%
Hispanic	53%
Asian	79%
Native American	69%

Note: The state did not provide an explanation of how graduation rates are calculated.

Higher Education

The state reports that some public community colleges and universities use the Regents examinations for admissions, scholarships, and course placement. Discussions have occurred between state K-12 education and higher education officials about linking the content of the Regents examinations to standards for what students need to know to enter college. As an example of how these conversations are being turned into policy, the City University of New York accepts a score of 75 on the Regents English and mathematics examinations as acceptable admissions tests for the university. The university is measuring the progress of students who enter via the Regents examination route against those who use the SAT route and the CUNY Freshman Skills Assessment Test route.

Other High School Assessments

New York does not currently use any other statewide end-of-course or college readiness examinations.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

North Carolina

Test Name: North Carolina High School Competency Tests and the North Carolina Tests of Computer Skills Multiple-Choice and Performance

Subjects Tested: Reading comprehension, mathematics, and computer skills

Initial Grades Tested: 8 and 9

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official state position on the purpose of the exit exam is laid out in the law authorizing the exam. The law states that the state board of education must adopt tests or other measurement devices to assure that graduates of the state's public high schools and nonpublic schools supervised by the state board possess the skills and knowledge necessary to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibilities of citizenship.

Historical and Policy Background

North Carolina began administering the North Carolina High School Competency Tests in 1978-79 and the North Carolina Tests of Computer Skills Multiple-Choice and Performance in 1996-97. The state did not administer another exit exam before these exams. Diplomas were first withheld based on performance in the reading and math tests in 1982 for students who entered ninth grade for the first time in 1978. Diplomas were first withheld in 2001 for performance on the computer skills test for students who entered eighth grade in the 1996-97 school year.

The oldest version of the competency test (used from 1978-79 through 1993-94) assessed reading, mathematics, and writing. The state board of education implemented a new requirement in 1994-95 that represented a more rigorous standard than the old minimum competency requirement. When the new requirement was implemented, the writing portion of the test was eliminated.

In 2003, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation calling on the state board of education to study the adoption or development of alternate means and standards for demonstrating minimum competency, beginning in grade 9, for students who have failed the competency test at least two times. This legislation has led to the adoption of additional options for students to pass competency tests, explained below. The state also plans to institute a new Web-based computer skills test to replace the current computer skills proficiency graduation requirement. The state plans to make this test available in 2005-06 for entering eighth graders.

In May 2005, the state board of education voted to adopt additional, new high school exit standards for students who are following the college/technical preparation, college/university preparation, and career preparation courses of study. Students who will enter ninth grade for the first time in 2006-07 will be the first group of students held to the new standards, which include passing end-of-course tests in algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, and biology and also successfully completing a senior project.

Test Characteristics

For the reading and math competency tests, school districts can schedule administration dates during each testing cycle (summer, fall, and spring). School districts must offer at least one testing opportunity annually beginning with ninth grade. Students may not take the competency tests earlier than the summer after they complete eighth grade. A student may take each competency test only once during the summer (if school is in session), fall, and spring. Seniors who have not met the competency standard must be given an additional opportunity to take the tests during the last month of school.

All students following the college/technical preparation, college/university preparation, and career preparation courses of study must pass the competency tests to receive a diploma, including private school and home-schooled students. Students with disabilities following the occupational course of study have to meet other rigorous requirements for graduation.

The state sets testing windows for the computer skills tests. The window is approximately six weeks in length during each testing cycle of summer, fall, and spring. If a student has not passed the test when it is initially given in eighth grade, school systems must offer at least one opportunity to students annually beginning in ninth grade. A student may take the multiple-choice test only once during the summer (if school is in session), fall, and spring. Only seniors may take the computer skills performance as a retest during the summer. Seniors who have not met the computer skills standard must be given an additional opportunity to take the tests during the last month of school.

The state considers the competency tests to be standards-based exams aligned to eighth grade standards. The exam was developed by the state. The state reports that the exit exams have undergone review internally to determine whether they are aligned to state standards and the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exam.

The North Carolina Competency Tests assess reading comprehension and mathematics. The North Carolina Tests of Computer Skills Multiple-Choice and Performance assess computer proficiency. The tests in all three subjects include multiple-choice items, but only the computer skills test includes performance tasks. The reading test is approximately 100 minutes, and the math test is about 97 minutes, but all students must be given sufficient time to complete the tests. All students are allowed to use calculators on part of the math test. On the computer skills test, testing times for students who entered ninth grade for the first time from 2000–01 and beyond are 90 minutes for the multiple-choice section and 100 minutes for the performance section.

For the new high school exit standards that involve passing five end-of-course tests, students will be given a maximum of two retest opportunities if they do not achieve a passing score on a particular end-of-course test.

NCLB

The results for the current exit exams will not be used to determine adequate yearly progress for high schools under the No Child Left Behind Act, since the exams are aligned to eighth grade standards.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the state computer skills performance test. The performance levels for the math and reading competency exams are achievement levels I, II, III, and IV. Students must meet the level III standard to pass the reading and math competency tests.

The state has recently changed from the first edition to the second edition of the test, which has generated a new series of cut scores that are equivalent to the earlier ones. The first number of the cut score refers to the edition of the test and thus the numerical changes in cut scores in recent years do not reflect any change in the standard for passing. The cut score for reading is currently 254, while the required score for math is 261.

The results are reported to school districts immediately after test administration and to schools, students, and parents 30 days after the district generates scores. Results are reported to the public once a year. Reports include information on whether the student passes or fails and the scores and subscores of skills and content for each major subject area. Test questions are not released each year.

If students fail an exit exam, the district must provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, including information about remediation requirements and future test dates.

The state does not have a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

If students have not met the exit exam requirements but have met other graduation requirements, they are permitted to retake the exit exams after the twelfth grade and still receive a diploma. A student may return to school for remedial instruction and for additional retesting until the maximum school age of 21, or beyond if the school district is willing to accept the student. The state does not collect data on pass rates after twelfth grade. The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet the graduation requirements in North Carolina.

If a student has scores from the North Carolina grade 8 end-of-grade tests (EOG), then these scores may be used to determine whether the student has met the competency test requirements. However, if the student lacks these scores or does not meet targets, additional screening may occur. Screening refers to the process of using certain nationally normed assessments instead of a score on the North Carolina Competency Tests in reading and mathematics. If a student passes certain nationally normed tests, they do not have to take the North Carolina reading and math competency tests. Students may also use a combination of measures to meet competency requirements, but they still must take the computer skills test of multiple choice and performance.

Beginning in 2004-05, all students have the following alternate options:

In cases where scores on nationally normed tests are not available, the following can be used:

- Seventh-grade EOG scores in reading/verbal and/or mathematics may be used to meet the competency requirement. Acceptable scores are the same as those for grade 8.
- The North Carolina algebra I end-of-grade test may be used to meet the mathematics competency requirement. Students must achieve a cutoff score equivalent to achievement level III or above.
- The North Carolina English I end-of-course test may be used to meet the reading/verbal competency requirement. Students must achieve a cutoff score equivalent to achievement level III or above.

In addition, PSAT or SAT scores may be used to meet the competency requirements. Scores from the ACT and College Board tests including the ACT PLAN, the ACT COMPASS and the College Board's ACCUPLACER may be used to meet the competency requirements.

Scores from the following four standardized, nationally normed tests, normed on a sample representative of the public school population in 1995 or later, may be used to meet the competency requirements. Scores from the eighth grade or higher editions of the test may be used.

- The California Achievement Test, fifth edition (CAT5)
- Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)
- Terra Nova
- Stanford Achievement Test 9 (SAT9)

Scores at the 50th percentile from other nationally standardized tests may be considered as an alternate means for demonstrating minimum competence upon official written request from the school district superintendent to the director of the state Division of Accountability Services.

Students who use nationally standardized tests to meet the competency requirements can use a combination of measures. For instance, a student may use the EOG at grade 8 for reading and the CAT5 to meet the mathematics competency requirement.

Students are required to make use of existing scores, or school districts may elect to incur the cost to administer the nationally standardized tests. The state will not cover the costs associated with the administration of nationally standardized tests for the purpose of meeting the competency requirements.

The state does not have a process for students to request a waiver or appeal the exit exam requirements. Students who do not receive a regular diploma can be awarded a certificate of achievement.

For the new high school exit standards, a review process will be used on a course-by-course basis if the student does not meet the passing criteria for the EOC assessment but passes the course. Principals will have the final authority to decide whether a student has met the exit standard for a particular course.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows accommodations for students with disabilities, including Braille test editions, large print editions, and test booklets with one item per page, among others. Additional accommodations provided by the state can be found at www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/testing/highschoolexitexam/accommodations.pdf. The same accommodations are considered for all state tests.

Students with disabilities who pass the exit exams using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Special education students who are following the occupational course of study (OCS) are not required to pass the competency test to graduate and receive a diploma. The OCS is one of four courses of study meeting the requirements for a North Carolina high school diploma. The OCS is designed to meet the needs of some students with disabilities who require a more functional curriculum. A student would not participate in the OCS unless the student's IEP team decides that the other three courses of study are inappropriate even with adaptations, modifications, and supplemental aids and services.

If the IEP team or section 504 committee determines that a student with disabilities who is following the career preparation, college technical preparation, or college/university course of study will not participate in the administration of the North Carolina Competency Tests of reading and mathematics, the decision must be documented in the current IEP or section 504 plan. If the decision is made not to participate in competency testing, students will not receive a high school diploma.

Students with disabilities must meet the computer skills standard by participating in one of the following:

1. The standard test administration
2. The standard test administration with accommodations, as stated in the student's current IEP, section 504 plan, or limited English proficiency documentation

3. The Computer Skills Portfolio Assessment Accommodation, as stated in the student's current IEP or section 504 plan. Students following the occupational course of study must meet the standard stated in the student's current IEP, as declared in state board of education policy HSP-N-004.

There are no special diplomas or certificates for students with disabilities who cannot pass the high school exit exam.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations on the exit exams, including word-to-phrase dictionaries and having the math and computer skills portions of the test read aloud in English. English language learners who pass the exit exams using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. There are no special alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, substitute tests, or diplomas for English language learners who do not pass the exit exam. ELL students are not exempted from taking the exams based on how long they have been in U.S. schools.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the competency tests. North Carolina state board of education policy HSP-N-000 states the following about student remediation:

Beginning with the graduating class of 1998, students who did not achieve grade-level proficiency in reading and mathematics at the end of the eighth grade will receive focused extended instructional opportunities which are different from and supplemental to regular high school course work and which are specifically designed to improve these students' performance to at least eighth-grade level proficiency.

In school year 2003-04, approximately \$45 million was allocated for the Improving Student Accountability program, and \$178 million was allocated for At-Risk Funds for grades 3-12. School systems may use part of these funds for student remediation. The Improving Student Accountability funds are allocated based on student and district performance. Fifty percent of the At-Risk Funds are allocated on a per pupil basis and the other 50% are allocated based on poverty.

The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the competency tests, including training in how to teach test-taking skills and training to familiarize teachers with the content of the competency test. The state has developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for the exams for students, including curriculum guides based on the exams, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests.

In addition, the state provides instructional notebooks in reading and mathematics to assist teachers in providing focused remediation for students who need to meet the competency requirement to receive a high school diploma. The state has also developed an instructional notebook to assist teachers in providing focused remediation for students who need to meet the computer skills requirement to receive a high school diploma.

Monitoring

The computer skills performance test in grade 8 is also part of the performance composite score of the state's ABC accountability program. Changes in the passing rates on the competency tests between grades 8 and 10 are part of the growth composite score of the ABC accountability program. The ABC of Public Education is North Carolina's school improvement program, which is designed to focus on accountability, the basics, and high educational standards, and on maximum local control. This is to ensure that the state's accountability measures are as fair and accurate as possible. It became law in 1995 prior to NCLB, which provides an additional measure of school accountability. NCLB accountability measures are included in the state's ABC accountability report.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Combined test data*
All students	77.8%
Male	no data
Female	no data
White	87.4%
Black	64.8%
Hispanic	52.7%
Asian	79.3%
Native American	69.0%
Multi-racial	81.3%
English language learners/LEP	67.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	54.0%

*Disaggregated data by subject are not available

Cumulative Pass Rates

The data on cumulative pass rates are for students during school year 2003-04.

All students	93.9%
Male	NA
Female	NA
White	95.0%
Black	89.4%
Hispanic	88.4%
Asian	92.9%
Native American	93.1%
Multi-racial	93.1%
English language learners/LEP	53.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	54.8%

Graduation Rates

The graduation rate is calculated using the percentage of students graduating in four years or less out of all students who graduated. These statistics are for school year 2003-04.

All students	95.7%
Male	94.1%
Female	97.1%
White	97.1%
Black	92.2%
Hispanic	90.7%
Asian	95.9%
Native American	93.8%
Multiracial	96.4%
English language learners/LEP	87.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch	92.7%
Students with disabilities	88.7%

Higher Education

North Carolina colleges and universities do not use the North Carolina High School Competency Test for admission decisions or scholarships. Information was not available as to whether these exams are used for college course placements. Students can enroll in public community colleges if they do not have a diploma. However, the public universities require students to have a diploma by the time they enroll.

State K-12 education officials and higher education officials have had discussions about linking the content of the competency tests to standards for what students need to know to enter college. The state board of education has discussed the development of a higher standard for a competency test or exit exam that would be more connected to a student's future plans, but no decision has been made at the time of the initial survey.

Other High School Assessments

North Carolina does not currently use any other statewide end-of-course or college readiness exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

Ohio

Test Name: Ohio Graduation Tests

Subjects Tested: Reading, mathematics, writing, science, social studies

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official purpose of the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGTs) is laid out in the law authorizing the exam. The law declares that the state has an interest in guaranteeing that all students in public schools, community schools (another name for public charter schools), and chartered nonpublic schools meet state curriculum requirements and pass all tests associated with graduation in order to earn an Ohio diploma. Students in nonchartered, nonpublic schools are not obliged to meet these requirements.

Historical and Policy Background

Ohio Revised Code sections 3301.0710-0712, 3313.61, and 3313.611-615 authorize the use of the Ohio Graduation Tests as the state high school exit exam. The state is currently phasing out its old tests, the ninth grade proficiency tests in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. The first administration of the Ohio Graduation Tests in reading and math took place in 2004, but the first administration that counts toward graduation occurred in March 2005. Three tests were added to the Ohio Graduation Tests in March 2005: writing, science, and social studies. The state board of education set performance standards in June 2004 for reading and math and in June 2005 for writing, science, and social studies. Results will count for graduation in all five areas in March 2006. Legislation passed in February 2005 allows students in all classes prior to the class of 2007 to use a passing score on the OGT to meet state graduation testing requirements.

Legislation mandates that the lowest-performing districts—those in academic watch and academic emergency, as well as districts with a three-year average graduation rate of no more than 75%—must use practice tests aligned to the graduation tests in the fall with their ninth grade students. These districts must also provide interventions for students demonstrating unsatisfactory progress.

Test Characteristics

The initial administration of the exam is in the spring of grade 10, with options to retake the exam in the summer and every fall and spring until the end of grade 12. Students may also continue to take the OGT after grade 12. The state considers the OGT to be a standards-based exam aligned with tenth grade standards. The state reports that the exams have undergone informal reviews by Achieve, Inc., which show that the math test is aligned to state standards. Formal studies to determine the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to the exit exams have not yet been conducted.

The Ohio Graduation Tests were developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. Students are given up to 150 minutes to complete each test and can take only one test per day. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test. Home-schooled students have the option of taking the tests, but their participation is not required. Private school students in chartered schools must take and pass the OGT, but those in nonchartered private schools do not take the OGT.

NCLB

The OGT results were first used for purposes of the No Child Left Behind Act in the 2003-04 school year. In 2005, results in reading, writing, and math counted for determining adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The science OGT will be used to meet NCLB testing requirements in 2007. The scores

from students' initial testing in reading and math are the ones that count for NCLB. The state will use the same achievement level on the test for both graduation and NCLB proficiency purposes. The science OGT will be used to meet NCLB testing requirements in 2007.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the exam. The performance levels for the OGTs are advanced, accelerated, proficient, basic, and limited. The passing scores for both the math and reading tests were adopted by the state board in June 2004. The cut scores for writing, science, and social studies were adopted in 2005. Students must score at the proficient level to meet the passing score for graduation. The cut scores for the 2005 administration are reported below.

READING	Cut Score (Out of 48 points)	Percentage of Total Points
Limited	---	---
Basic	12.0	25%
Proficient	18.0	38%
Accelerated	32.0	67%
Advanced	40.0	83%

MATHEMATICS	Cut Score (Out of 48 points)	Percentage of Total Points
Limited	---	---
Basic	12.5	27%
Proficient	18.0	39%
Accelerated	27.5	60%
Advanced	34.5	75%

WRITING	Cut Score (Out of 48 points)	Percentage of Total Points
Limited	---	---
Basic	18.0	38%
Proficient	25.5	53%
Accelerated	34.0	71%
Advanced	41.0	85%

SCIENCE	Cut Score (Out of 48 points)	Percentage of Total Points
Limited	---	---
Basic	14.5	30%
Proficient	23.5	49%
Accelerated	32.0	67%
Advanced	37.5	78%

SOCIAL STUDIES	Cut Score (Out of 48 points)	Percentage of Total Points
Limited	---	---
Basic	15.0	31%
Proficient	21.5	45%
Accelerated	33.0	69%
Advanced	39.0	81%

The results are reported to districts and schools two months after the exam is administered. District and school results are shared with the district test coordinator so there is one point of contact. Results are reported to the public after each administration. Reports include information on whether the student passed or failed, as well as students' scores and subscores of skills and content under each major subject area. All test questions, with sample student responses, are released each year on the Internet.

When students fail an exit exam, the district is required to provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation, future test dates, implications for course-taking, and a graduation checklist. The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers to track achievement.

Student Options

If students have not met the exit exam requirement but have met the other graduation requirements, they may retake the exit exam after twelfth grade and still receive a diploma, but the state does not collect data on their passing rates. Students can retake the tests until they receive a passing score and will receive a diploma after completing this and all other graduation requirements. There are no limits on age or the number of times a student can retake an exam. The state currently does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Ohio, nor does the state allow other tests to be substituted for the Ohio Graduation Tests. No alternate diplomas or certificates are available for general education students who do not receive regular diplomas.

The state does have an appeals process. This appeal currently applies to seniors required to pass the ninth grade proficiency tests and will be available for seniors required to pass the OGT. In particular, qualified students may have an oral administration of all tests except the writing test. To qualify, students must:

- Be second semester seniors who have taken and failed the graduation tests before;
- Have participated in intervention programs offered; and
- Be identified as limited English proficient or have at least a 2.5 grade point average out of 4.0 in the high school courses covered by the tests not yet passed.

The school submits an application to the state for the student to have an oral administration, and the appeal for an oral administration is granted if these qualifications are met. Because the test is first required for the class of 2007, the state will not have second semester seniors qualify for the oral administration for two more years.

In addition, section 3313.615 of the Ohio Revised Code provides an alternate way for students graduating after September 15, 2006, to meet the graduation test requirements. Under this section, a student may meet the testing requirement if he or she passes four of the five graduation tests and meets all of the following criteria:

- Misses the proficient score by 10 points or less
- Has a 97% attendance rate in each of the last four school years, excluding any excused absences
- Has not been expelled from school in any of the last four school years
- Has a grade point average of at least 2.5 out of 4.0 in the subject area of the test not yet passed
- Has completed the high school curriculum requirements

- Has taken advantage of any intervention programs provided by the district or school
- Holds letters recommending graduation from each of the student's high school teachers in the subject areas not yet passed and from the high school principal

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows accommodations for students with disabilities on the OGT and all statewide tests. Ohio does not have a list of all possible accommodations. The Ohio Administrative Code defines four criteria, as follows, for allowable accommodations:

- The accommodation must be typically afforded the student for classroom and districtwide tests.
- The accommodation cannot change the content or structure of the test.
- The accommodation cannot change what the test is intended to measure.
- The accommodation cannot change or enhance the student's response.

The OGTs have also been produced in Braille and large print and on an English audio CD for students who require these accommodations. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. The individualized education program of a student with disabilities will reflect the decision of the IEP team about whether the student may be excluded from having to pass each of the graduation tests to earn an Ohio diploma. The state does not award alternative diplomas or certificates for students with disabilities who do not pass the OGTs. The same appeal process that applies to all students applies to students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are also eligible to take an OGT alternate assessment, which consists of a classroom-based collection of evidence and is available in all five subjects.

English Language Learners

The state allows students identified as limited English proficient to have additional time of up to one full day for each test and to use dictionaries. Students who are identified as "English limited" (who have spent less than three years in U.S. schools and have scores below proficient in both the reading and writing domains of the state's English language proficiency tests) may use additional accommodations. English language learners may have an oral translator for the test areas of math, science, and social studies. There are no testing exemptions for recently arrived ELL students.

For reading tests, reading passages may not be translated or read aloud; students must read the reading passage on the reading test in English. Writing also must be completed in English.

Additionally, foreign language CDs of the tests are available in five languages—Arabic, Somali, Chinese, Spanish, and Korean—but students must still read passages on the reading test in English. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma. The state has no special certificates for ELLs who do not pass the high school exit exam, nor does it provide any targeted assistance to help ELLs pass the tests.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the Ohio Graduation Tests. Students are not required to attend remediation programs, however. The state has set aside remediation funds, allocated on a per pupil basis, for 2004 and 2005. In fiscal year

2004, \$3.7 million was set aside for interventions for ninth graders, and in fiscal year 2005, \$5.9 million was set aside for interventions for ninth and tenth graders. Funds can be used for staff salaries, materials, and training to provide services to students whose practice OGT scores suggest they would fail graduation tests. Funds can be used to provide after-school, in-school, Saturday, or summer school interventions for students in districts that were in academic emergency status in 2003 or 2004.

The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the OGTs, including training to familiarize teachers with the content of the OGTs and training in how to teach test-taking skills, interpret test results, and score open-ended items on the graduation practice tests.

Funds for professional development for teachers were appropriated on a per pupil basis in fiscal year 2004 to districts in academic emergency and in fiscal year 2005 to districts with a three-year average graduation rate of 75% or lower. These funds will be used to provide five days of ongoing, embedded professional development for ninth and tenth grade classroom teachers in the five subjects on the graduation tests. This professional development will focus on helping teachers to develop subject matter competency, cultural competency, skills for analyzing test data, and data-based intervention strategies to prepare students below grade level to pass the graduation tests.

The state has developed curriculum guides based on the exams, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests. The state has also developed practice tests to help students pass the exams.

Monitoring

State legislation charged the Ohio Legislative Office of Education Oversight with conducting a study of performance of the class of 2007 on the Ohio Graduation Tests. The study must look at the performance of all students who enter ninth grade beginning in July 1, 2003, and must not exclude from any analysis students who leave school before graduating. The study will determine how many students from this cohort reach the proficient level of performance on all five areas of the OGT by June 30, 2007. The study will also determine, to the extent possible, how many students satisfy the alternative conditions in section 3313.615 of the Revised Code for meeting the testing requirements and becoming eligible for a diploma. Written reports are to be issued to the Ohio General Assembly in June 2006 and June 2007, with the final report due no later than June 30, 2008.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2005

Subgroups	Math	Reading	Writing	Science	Social Studies
All students	80%	91%	82%	71%	78%
Male	80%	88%	76%	72%	78%
Female	80%	93%	89%	70%	78%
White	85%	93%	86%	77%	82%
Black	53%	78%	63%	35%	52%
Hispanic	64%	80%	67%	49%	59%
Asian	90%	93%	87%	80%	85%
Native American	63%	84%	70%	59%	68%
English language learners/LEP	48%	62%	44%	29%	44%
Students with disabilities	31%	53%	30%	23%	31%
Multiracial	73%	87%	77%	63%	73%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Cumulative pass rates were not available as the first administration of the OGT that counts for graduation occurred in March 2005.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates shown below are for school year 2003-04. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of graduates by (a) the number of graduates, plus (b) the number of students who dropped out minus the number of dropouts who returned to school. This calculation divides the number of graduates by the number of students who entered the class in ninth grade.

All students	84.3%
Male	NA
Female	NA
White	88.6%
Black	62.9%
Hispanic	71.6%
Asian	92.1%
Native American	67.0%
English language learners/LEP	73.8%
Economically disadvantaged	81.0%
Students with disabilities	78.9%
Multiracial	79.5%

Higher Education

Public universities in Ohio have not yet decided if they will use the Ohio Graduation Test scores for admissions or other decisions. Most public universities require a diploma for admission, although one accepts students with a GED. One state education official referred to anecdotal evidence of students taking the OGT repeatedly to get a better score for their college application. The community colleges in Ohio use open enrollment and do not require a diploma (although in some cases, students must complete their GED by the time they graduate from the college). The community colleges do not plan on using the scores in their admissions processes.

The Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents continue to discuss issues surrounding high school exit skills and college entry-level skills.

Other High School Assessments

Ohio has not developed any statewide end-of-course exams or college readiness tests.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

South Carolina

Test Name: High School Assessment Program
Subjects Tested: English language arts and mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10
Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

According to the South Carolina State Board of Education, the official purpose of the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) is “to measure student performance on state standards and identify areas in which students need additional support [and] indicate the academic achievement for schools, districts, and the State.”

Historical and Policy Background

In 1998, the South Carolina legislature passed the South Carolina Education Accountability Act. The High School Assessment Program was developed to meet the requirements of both this law and the No Child Left Behind Act. South Carolina began administering the HSAP in 2004. Prior to the HSAP, the state administered the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP), a minimum competency exam. The class of 2006 will be the first class required to pass the HSAP to graduate.

In spring 2004, the state developed a new appeals process that allows individual students’ tests to be rescored. A school district can request a rescore, and if there is an error in scoring, the testing company pays the rescoring fee.

The state is phasing out the BSAP as it phases in the HSAP. Students who have previously taken the BSAP but not passed all tests, students who have not previously taken the BSAP but have successfully completed enough Carnegie units to be classified as eleventh to twelfth graders, and students who were eligible to take the BSAP in fall 2003 or earlier but did not take it for some reason must pass all of the BSAP tests to receive a diploma.

Test Characteristics

The High School Assessment Program tests are administered in April and October each year. The state reports that the HSAP is a standards-based exam based on the South Carolina curriculum standards through grade 10. The state ensured the exit exam was aligned with content standards during the test development process. After spring 2003, the South Carolina Educational Oversight Committee conducted an independent internal review of the exam’s alignment with state curriculum standards.

The HSAP tests mathematics and English language arts. The test consists of multiple-choice, constructed-response and extended-response questions. The HSAP is not a timed exam, but students must complete each test by the end of the school day. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test, although the questions were not written to require a calculator. Students are also allowed to use a dictionary or thesaurus for extended-response questions in the English language arts section of the exam and a reference sheet with formulas and graph paper on the math test. Home-schooled students in South Carolina must also pass the HSAP, but students attending private schools do not have to.

NCLB

The results of the HSAP in English language arts and math have been used to determine adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act since fall 2004. Students take the HSAP tests for the first time for NCLB accountability in the second spring after they initially enroll in ninth grade. Students must score at level 3 on the exam to meet the proficiency standards for adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The total scale score for each subject is used for NCLB reporting. The state plans to develop a science exam in 2006 but has not yet determined if the science test will be required for graduation.

Scoring and Reporting

The High School Assessment Program uses four performance levels—1, 2, 3, and 4—and each subject test is scored on a scale of 100–320. Students must score at level 2 (200 or above) or higher on each test to meet the test requirement for a South Carolina high school diploma. Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the exam. District scores are reported in the annual state report card.

Scores are reported to the district within three months of testing. Students are notified of their subject area scores, their scores on the English language arts extended-response items, and their total score on the math integrated-response items. Districts are responsible for distributing reports to schools, students, and parents. School and district results are released annually as soon as they are announced, usually in late summer or early fall for tests administered in the spring. The test forms are not released each year, but sample questions are available to the public online.

Student Options

Students have four opportunities to retake the exam by the end of twelfth grade. The first retest option is in October of eleventh grade. After the fourth testing, students who are not accruing at least three academic units a year cannot retake the test until they are classified as seniors. Beginning in 2006, an administration of the exit exam will be available during the summer after twelfth grade for students who have met all other graduation requirements and were actively enrolled in school. Additionally, students enrolled in adult education programs can continue to retake the exam without age limits. Students who do not receive a regular high school diploma can receive a state certificate indicating the number of credits earned and the grades completed. The state does not allow students to submit passing scores from exit exams in other states to meet the graduation test requirement.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows testing accommodations and modifications used in typical classroom instruction for students with disabilities. Students with a current individualized education program or section 504 plan must participate in the HSAP assessment process. These students may take the assessment with or without accommodations or modifications. If the student cannot participate with accommodations or modifications, he or she must be designated as requiring an alternate assessment and be tested with the HSAP-Alt, an alternate assessment designed for students with serious cognitive impairments.

The IEP team decides whether a student with a documented disability can participate in an alternate assessment after determining that the student meets all of the following criteria:

1. The student demonstrates cognitive ability and adaptive skills that prevent completion of the state-approved standards even with accommodations and modifications.

2. The student requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to enable him or her to apply and transfer the skills needed to function in school, work, home, and community environments.
3. The student is unable to apply or use academic skills in natural settings when instructed solely or primarily through school-based instruction.
4. The student's inability to complete the state standards is not the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, and economic differences.

Students who meet all of these requirements and were age 15 as of September 1 of the assessment year are eligible to take the HSAP-Alt.

English Language Learners

English language learners are allowed to use testing accommodations approved by the state, including word-for-word bilingual dictionaries, direction in their native language, small group administration, oral translation of the math exam, and extra time. ELLs who take the exam using accommodations still receive a regular diploma. English language learners are exempt from taking the HSAP during the first year they are enrolled in school in the United States, but they must still pass the test to meet the graduation requirement.

Support Policies

The state has distributed to students an information guide about the exit exam but has not developed any preparation or remediation programs and materials to help students pass the exit exams. Local school districts must also:

1. Provide students who did not pass a particular part of the exit exam with academic assistance related to the parts not passed; and
2. Advise students who have met all other requirements for graduation but have not passed the exit exam that they may choose one of the following alternatives:
 - a. Accept, in lieu of a state high school diploma, a state certificate indicating the number of credits earned and the grades completed;
 - b. Stay actively enrolled in high school until they reach 21, or stay enrolled in an adult education program until they pass the exit examination; or
 - c. Accept a state certificate and maintain their opportunities to pass the exit exam by enrolling in high school until age 21 or enrolling in an adult education program.

Students, schools, and school districts receive reports detailing areas on the test in which they need improvement. This allows students to prepare for retests and schools to tailor instruction to meet students' needs. Students who do not pass the exit exam must enroll in a remedial program. Local school districts develop programs to help ELL students pass the exam, but these vary widely by area and are often individualized in districts with small ELL populations.

The state legislature approved \$120,352,806 for statewide academic assistance programs for grades K-12 in school year 2004-05. This money is not for new state programs but for remediation efforts by local school districts. These funds are weighted towards districts with larger percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch at all grade levels and districts with greater proportions of low-performing students, as measured by state tests in grades 4-12.

Monitoring

In addition to NCLB accountability requirements, exit exam results are released in annual school and district report cards that rate school performance, as required by the state's Education Accountability Act.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

The table below shows the initial pass rates on the state exit exam in reading and math. The overall initial pass rate (students passing both parts of the exam) is 76%.

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts
All students	80.1%	85.0%
Male	77.9%	80.9%
Female	82.2%	88.9%
White	89.2%	92.3%
Black	66.9%	75.2%
Hispanic	74.4%	70.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	93.0%	89.6%
American Indian/Alaskan	78.9%	84.3%
English language learners/LEP	67.2%	48.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch	68.2%	74.6%
Students with disabilities	34.8%	41.8%
Migrant	73.3%	46.7%
Adult education	20.8%	30.4%

Cumulative Pass Rates

No cumulative pass rates are available because the HSAP was not given to twelfth graders before April 2005.

Graduation Rates

The table below shows the graduation rates for the class of 2004 provided by the state. The graduation rate was calculated by determining what percentage of all students (including students with disabilities) who entered the ninth grade for the first time four years earlier at any high school earned a South Carolina high school diploma by the end of 2004. Dropouts were kept in the denominator, and early graduates were counted in both the numerator and denominator.

All students	77.3%
Male	72.1%
Female	82.2%
White	82.5%
Black	69.8%
Hispanic	68.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	84.7%
American Indian/Alaskan	79%
English language learners/LEP	49.1%
Free or reduced price lunch	66%
Students with disabilities	35.7%
Migrant	66.7%

Higher Education

South Carolina public universities do not use the high school exit examination scores in making decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement. No discussion has occurred between state K-12 and higher education officials about linking the content of the state's exit exam to standards for what students need to know to enter college.

Other High School Assessments

The state has developed statewide end-of-course tests in algebra/mathematics for the technologies, English, biology/applied biology, and physical science. An additional end-of-course test is being developed for U.S. history and the Constitution and will be field-tested in spring 2006. The state has not developed any other college readiness tests.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

Tennessee

Test Name: Gateway Examinations
Subjects Tested: Algebra I, biology I, and English II
Initial Grade Tested: Varies
Test Type: End-of-course

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The Web site of the Tennessee Department of Education lays out the rationale for the variety of exit exams that the state has chosen. “Algebra I is a gateway subject, needed for future success in math and in the increasingly technical workplace.” English II is included because “the ability to communicate is critical for future academic success and success in the workplace.” For biology, “an understanding of science content and science reasoning is crucial for success in the workplace.”

Historical and Policy Background

On October 29, 1998, in compliance with TCA 49-1-608 and TCA 49-6-6001(a)(1), the Tennessee State Board of Education accepted the recommendation of the High School Testing Advisory Committee and designated 10 high school courses for the development of end-of-course examinations. The board’s recommendation was later affirmed by the Select Oversight Committee on Education of the General Assembly.

In an official policy, the board stipulated that beginning with students entering ninth grade in 2001-02, students must successfully pass end-of-course exams in three subjects: algebra I, biology I, and English II. These exams later became known as the Gateway Examinations. The other seven areas to be tested are math foundations, geometry, algebra II, physical science, chemistry, English I, and U.S. history. In 2005, the state began to withhold diplomas for students who failed the Gateway exams.

The state is currently phasing out its previous test, the Tennessee Competency Test. There are no current plans to introduce new exams other than the Gateway exams. The state board of education is currently discussing alternate routes for earning a diploma under this testing system.

Test Characteristics

Since 2001-02, the Tennessee Department of Education has administered the Gateway exams three times annually to accommodate students completing work in the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Tests are given only at these scheduled times. The Gateway exams are administered in December, May, and July. Students can take the exams after finishing the course associated with the exam. Most students will take the tests in high school, although students who take algebra I in seventh or eighth grade may take the exam when they finish the course. These earlier administrations will count toward the graduation requirement. Only private school students in Category 1 accredited private schools must comply with exit exam requirements; home-schooled students may take the exams at the end of a course, but they are not required for graduation.

The state considers the Gateway exams to be end-of-course exams aligned to grade 10 state standards. The exams were developed by a testing company specifically for the state. The state reported that the exit exam has been reviewed internally to determine whether it is aligned to state standards. All items for potential use in the Gateway exams are screened by a representative panel assembled by the state department of education before the vendor can use them. The vendor provides the state with detailed item maps for each form of the Gateway exams showing which state content objectives and subskills are assessed by each item.

The Gateway exam tests algebra I, biology I, and English II. The tests consist of multiple-choice questions, and they are not timed. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

NCLB

In 2002-03, Tennessee began using the results from the first time a student takes the graduation test to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The science test will also be used for NCLB purposes beginning in 2007-08. The state uses the same cut scores for NCLB proficiency that it uses to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

The performance levels for the graduation exam are advanced, proficient, and below proficient. All tests have approximately 62 questions. In 2005, students must achieve a raw score of 30 in math, 20 in science, and 25 in language arts to be considered proficient. The advanced level requires a raw score of 42 in math, 36 in science, and 39 in language arts. Scores are reported to districts within 72 hours after the tests are scanned. The district in turn sends reports to schools, with printed reports for students and parents following later. Information is released publicly after each administration only if the school district chooses to notify the local paper. The state releases data to the public annually in July. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed and their scores and subscores (skills and content) for each major subject area. The questions from the exit exams are not released. The state has developed student-level identifiers for tracking achievement and is currently developing a system to use these identifiers for enrollment information.

When students fail an exit exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements and future test dates.

Student Options

Students have three opportunities each year to retake sections of the exam before the end of twelfth grade. Students can begin to retake the exams at the next administration. If students have not passed the exit exam but have met other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam after the twelfth grade, with no limit on age, and receive a diploma. There are no limits to the number of times students can take the exam.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exams to meet graduation requirements in Tennessee. The state does not allow students to earn a regular high school diploma by passing a substitute test. The state does not have a process for students who fail the exam to request a waiver or appeal the exit exam, but students who do not receive a regular diploma are eligible to receive a certificate of attendance.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations during the exit exam. These students are entitled to receive accommodations outlined in their IEP, including large print or Braille exams, alternate settings, visual aids, auditory aids, multiple testing sessions, flexible scheduling, a scribe, and extended time. The state offers a special education diploma for students with disabilities who do not receive a regular diploma.

English Language Learners

English language learners may be provided with test accommodations, including extended time, breaks during testing, multiple testing sessions, small-group administration, use of dictionaries and glossaries, and administration of test instructions in their native language. English language learners who do not receive a regular diploma are eligible for the certificate of attendance available to all students. The state does not offer any targeted assistance to help ELL students pass the exam.

Students with disabilities and English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests for students with disabilities or English language learners.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the Gateway exams, and students are required to attend these programs. The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the state high school exit exams, including programs to train teachers in teaching test-taking skills and interpreting test results, to familiarize teachers with the content of the exit exam, and to help teachers with curriculum development in reading. The state also uses exit exam consultants who provide professional development for teachers. The state has developed curriculum guides based on the exams, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, practice tests, and information guides explaining the tests. School districts have been responsible for preparation and remediation programs and materials to help students with the exams. The state provides some teacher training specifically to assist special student populations with passing the exit exams. During 2004, Tennessee provided \$4 million in funding on a per pupil basis for remediation for students who fail the exit exam.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the Gateway exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2004

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Science
All students	86.1%	92.0%	97.3%
Male	85.2%	89.8%	96.7%
Female	87.0%	94.1%	98.0%
White	93.7%	94.4%	98.4%
Black	66.0%	84.5%	91.5%
Hispanic	76.3%	85.8%	95.4%
Asian	92.6%	94.2%	99.8%
Native American	93.8%	87.2%	98.6%
English language learners/LEP	59.2%	58.8%	86.8%
Free or reduced-price lunch	73.0%	84.0%	92.9%
Students with disabilities	52.4%	57.8%	78.1%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Cumulative pass rates are currently not available.

Graduation Rates

The data below represent graduation data from school year 2003-2004. The graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of regular on-time graduates by the number of regular on-time graduates, regular late graduates, and dropouts for each of the preceding four years.

All students	75.7%
Male	NA
Female	NA
White	80.4%
Black	61.8%
Hispanic	67.9%
Asian	81.7%
Native American	73.2%
English language learners/LEP	NA
Free or reduced-price lunch	NA
Students with disabilities	NA

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Higher Education

According to the Center's 2003 high school exit exam study, public universities and community colleges in Tennessee do not use the Gateway exams for admissions or course placement. Students cannot be admitted to a public university or community college if they do not receive a diploma.

Other High School Assessments

Tennessee also administers other end-of-course exams that are not required for graduation. It has not developed any college readiness exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

Texas

Test Name: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Subjects Tested: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies

Initial Grade Tested: 11

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The 2003-2007 Strategic Plan of the Texas Education Agency states, “All students in the Texas public education system will graduate from high school with a world-class education.” It goes on to say, “The Texas Education Agency will provide the state’s public education system with program leadership to ensure all students are challenged, perform at grade level or above, and demonstrate strong performance in reading and the foundation subjects of mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies.”

Historical and Policy Background

In 1999, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 103, which mandated the development of a new state assessment program to replace the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), which had served as the state assessment since 1990. This new program, called the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), was administered for the first time in spring 2003. Students first take the TAKS in the spring of grade 11. Although the TAKS was administered to all eleventh graders in spring 2003, it did not become a graduation requirement for eleventh graders until the spring 2004 administration.

Two standards—met the standard and commended performance—were established for the TAKS through a year-long standard-setting process, which culminated in a series of standard-setting meetings. At these meetings, active Texas educators and other representatives of the state population followed a process to develop recommendations for the state board of education. In November 2002, the state board approved the standard-setting committees’ recommendations but decided to phase in the recommended standards over three years.

In April 2004, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) established standards on the TAKS exit-level mathematics and English language arts tests which indicate that a student is ready to enroll in an institution of higher education.

Test Characteristics

The primary administration for the English language arts exam occurs in February and for the mathematics, science, and social studies exams occurs in April. Retests are given in July, October, February, and April of each year. The state considers the TAKS to be a standards-based exam aligned to the state-mandated curriculum. The test was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. Both the state and external reviewers have carefully evaluated the exam to ensure that it is a valid measure of the curriculum. Internal committees of state-level subject area specialists and committees of Texas educators review all test items to ensure a close alignment between the state-mandated curriculum and the TAKS test. In addition, Achieve, Inc., provided an external review of the link between Texas’s curriculum and the TAKS test.

TAKS exit-level tests include mathematics, English language arts (an integrated reading/writing test), science, and social studies. For the TAKS, each subject area test is linked to specific high school courses. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The

TAKS is not timed. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test, and districts must ensure that students have access to a graphing calculator to take the exam. Home-schooled and private school students do not have to pass the TAKS test to receive a diploma.

NCLB

The exit exam does not count for determining adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees score TAKS open-ended questions and compositions. The performance levels for the TAKS are did not meet the standard, met the standard, and commended performance. The scale scores required to pass the exit-level subject area tests in 2003-04 through 2005-06 (the equivalent of met the standard) are shown in the table below. These scale scores are converted from raw scores and represent the phase-in standards approved by the state board of education.

School Year	Mathematics	English Language Arts	Social Studies	Science
2003-04	2015	2045	2033	2035
2004-05	2058	2072	2067	2068
2005-06	2100	2100	2100	2100

The scale score required to achieve commended performance is 2400 for each of the subject areas.

The results are reported to districts and schools about 14 working days after testing. A confidential report of results is generated for each student, and summary reports are generated for campuses, districts, regions, and the state as a whole. Reports include information on whether the student passes or fails, subject area scores, subscores of skills and content under each major subject area, and scores on individual test items. All tests, answer keys, and scoring guides are released every other year.

When students fail the exit exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information to help prepare them for future administration of the test. This information may include information about remedial requirements, future test dates, and implications for course taking. A comprehensive summer remediation study guide and a personalized study guide are provided by the Texas Education Agency testing contractor free of charge to any student who fails one or more subject area test.

Student Options

Students are first permitted to retake the exam in July following grade 11. If students meet all other requirements to graduate except passing the TAKS, they may continue to retake the exam after grade 12, without limits on age. There is no limit on the number of times a student can retake an exam. The state currently does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Texas, but the Texas Education Agency is working with other states to develop reciprocity agreements. The state does not allow other tests to be substituted for the TAKS. There are no alternate diplomas or certificates available for general education students who do not receive regular diplomas, nor are there any waiver or appeals processes in place.

The state allows students who have not passed one or more section of the exit-level assessment to continue taking the assessment each time a retest is administered, even after they have left school. These students are classified as out-of-school students, and the state collects data on this group of students. These data will be reported to the public for the first time beginning with the reports from

the February administration of the exit-level retest, which is not yet available. The state maintains information on the number of times an individual student attempts the exit-level assessment and reports that information on each student's confidential student report (CSR). The state does not currently aggregate these data, however, and they are not readily available. Because this is student-level data, it would have to be masked to ensure that no confidential student information is revealed. A sample CSR, which helps explain how this information is reported to students, can be found in the Interpreting Assessment Report at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/guides/interpretive/TAKS_05.pdf or in the parent brochure sent to each student with test results at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/guides/parent_csr/gr11.pdf.

Special Populations

The state allows students with disabilities and English language learners to use accommodations on the exams. Students in these two subgroups who pass the exit exam using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.

Students with disabilities may be exempted from the TAKS exit-level test by their admission, review, and dismissal committee. At the state level, there are no special diplomas or certificates for students with disabilities who do not pass the TAKS.

For English language learners, there are no appeals or waiver processes or special certificates or diplomas for those who do not pass the high school exit exam.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the TAKS, although the state does not require students to attend remediation programs. Summer remediation study guides are provided to students who do not pass the TAKS tests administered in grades 3-11. The cost of the guides, approximately \$2.5 million, is not broken down by grade level. The state has also budgeted approximately \$2 million in the 2004-05 school year to provide personalized study guides to students who fail one or more subject area of the exit-level TAKS test.

The funds for the summer guides are not provided to the districts or students directly, but are used by the state to develop the guides, which are distributed to school districts to give to students who did not pass one or more subject area tests on the TAKS. The purpose of these guides is to help students strengthen their skills in the areas in which they need assistance.

In 2004, the Texas Education Agency began providing personalized study guides in addition to the general TAKS study guides to students who do not pass one or more portions of the TAKS test as an additional resource. These guides help the student to focus on areas of the curriculum in which he or she needs the most remediation.

In addition, a state Compensatory Education Fund of about \$1.1 billion per year provides funding to school districts to serve at-risk populations, such as those who are at risk of dropping out of school. The target population includes students in exit-level grades, although funds are distributed among all grade levels. One criteria for determining "at-risk" students is specified in the Texas Education Code as students who "did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student." Districts are required to provide "accelerated instruction" to these students and document the effectiveness of their programs in reducing dropouts.

The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the TAKS, including a Teacher Quality Grant program that supports efforts to improve teachers' content knowledge of the state curriculum and assessment standards. The state has developed information guides explaining the tests, computer-based programs, and study guides for students.

Monitoring

Performance on the exit exam is part of the state accountability system. Accreditation sanctions are specified in state law for campuses and districts that are low performing and include actions such as hearings, annexation, appointment of a conservator or management team, or reconstitution.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers, Spring 2004

Subgroups	Math	English Language Arts	Science	Social Studies	All Tests Taken
All students	85%	87%	85%	97%	72%
Male	85%	83%	87%	97%	71%
Female	84%	91%	82%	97%	73%
Native American	88%	89%	88%	98%	75%
Asian	95%	91%	93%	98%	85%
African American	73%	82%	74%	96%	58%
Hispanic	78%	81%	75%	95%	61%
White	91%	92%	93%	99%	83%
Economically disadvantaged	76%	79%	74%	94%	58%
Title 1, Part A	79%	82%	77%	95%	63%
Migrant	73%	73%	68%	92%	51%
English language learners/LEP	59%	42%	47%	81%	24%
Bilingual	77%	84%	81%	98%	60%
English as a Second Language	58%	39%	46%	80%	22%
Special education	55%	56%	57%	88%	35%
Gifted and talented	99%	98%	99%	100%	97%
At-risk	72%	77%	71%	94%	52%
Career/technology education	84%	86%	84%	97%	71%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The cumulative pass rate information below is calculated based on a cohort of students. Students in grade 11 who took one or more exit-level tests in spring 2004 for the first time were included in the cohort. Students who did not test in spring 2004 but began testing after that were not included in the calculation. These cumulative pass rates are based on the primary test administration in spring 2004 and the three retest opportunities (July and October of 2004, and February 2005) for which the state has data. The results from February are preliminary. These students had an additional opportunity to take a retest in April 2005, but the results of the April retest were not available as of press time.

All students	89%
White	95%
African American	82%
Hispanic	83%
Economically disadvantaged	82%
English language learners/LEP	54%
Special education	58%

Graduation Rates

The graduation rates shown below are for the 2002-03 school year. The cohort includes students who began ninth grade in the 1999-2000 school year. The graduation rate is calculated as the percentage of students from a class of ninth graders who complete their high school education by their anticipated graduation date. Members of the class of 2003 were identified as students who attended grade 9 for the first time in 1999-2000 and were expected to have graduated in spring 2003.

All students	84.2%
Male	80.9%
Female	87.7%
White	89.8%
Black	81.1%
Hispanic	77.3%
Asian	91.5%
Native American	84.7%

Higher Education

Some community colleges and public universities use results from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills for admissions and course placement decisions. The TAKS testing program is required by law to include a higher education readiness component (HERC) on the exit-level assessment. Beginning in spring 2004, performance on the grade 11 exit-level mathematics and English language arts tests was used to assess not only a student's level of academic preparation for graduation from a Texas public high school, but also the student's readiness to enroll in an institution of higher education.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board established the higher education readiness standards. To be considered "college ready," students must achieve a score of 2200 on the English language arts assessment, with a writing subscore of at least 3, and a score of 2200 on the mathematics assessment. A student who meets these HERC scores is exempt from state-mandated testing requirements under the Texas Success Initiative. In particular, these students are exempt from the requirement to take the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test or another assessment designed by the coordinating board before entering a Texas public college or university.

Other High School Assessments

The state has developed an optional algebra I end-of-course assessment that is administered online to students.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

Utah

Test Name: Utah Basic Skills Competency Test
Subjects Tested: Reading, writing, and mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10
Test Type: Minimum competency

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The official state purpose of the exam is laid out in the authorizing law. The legislation states that the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT) is to be administered to Utah students beginning in grade 10 and must include, at a minimum, components on English, language arts, reading, and mathematics. Utah students must satisfy the requirements of the UBSCT, in addition to state and district graduation requirements, before receiving a basic high school diploma.

Historical and Policy Background

Utah Code, Section 53A-1-611(2)(b) and 53A-1-611(2)(d) and Utah State Board of Education Rules R277-705-10; R277-705-4, 6, 7; R277-700-6E; and R277-473-3A(1) authorize the use of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test as the state high school exit exam. The first operational test was administered in February 2004. The class of 2006 will be the first required to pass the UBSCT to receive a basic high school diploma. There are no plans to replace UBSCT at this time.

Test Characteristics

The UBSCT exams are administered the first week in February and the third week in October every year. The state considers these exams to be minimum competency tests aligned to standards for grades 6 through 10. The exams were developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The tests have undergone review by the state, the development contractor, Utah teachers, and an advisory committee.

The UBSCT tests reading, writing, and mathematics. The exam consists of multiple-choice and writing prompt/essay questions. The tests are not timed. All students are permitted to use a calculator for part of the math test.

Home-schooled students are required to pass the UBSCT to receive diplomas, although students in private schools are not.

NCLB

The state is not planning to use the UBSCT to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees and teachers grade the open-ended questions of the exam. The performance levels of the exam range from 1 to 4, with 1 signifying the minimal performance level, 2 the partial level, 3 sufficient, and 4 substantial. Students need to score a 3 or 4 to pass the exam. Scores are reported using a scaled score. The UBSCT subtests are equated from test form to test form, so that a particular scaled score earned on one form of the test has the same meaning as the same scaled score earned on another form of the test. A score of 160 is the minimum scaled score associated with the sufficient proficiency level. Scores are reported to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public approximately six weeks after testing. Results are reported to the

public after each administration of the exam. Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed. This report also includes the student's scores and subscores (skills or content) for each major subject area. A past form of the test has been released and appears on the state's Web site. The state is also considering releasing on the Internet some questions from previous test administrations for each subtest.

If students fail an exit exam, the district must provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, future test dates, and implications for course taking.

The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Student Options

Students have five opportunities by the end of grade 12 to take the UBSCT, and they first take the test in February of the tenth grade. Students who have not passed any of the subtests may retake another form of the exam at any of the next administrations in October and/or February of their eleventh or twelfth grade years. The state collects information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the high school exit examination but has not made this information public. If students have not met the exit exam requirement but have met other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exam after the twelfth grade and receive a diploma through an adult education program. The state has no information on these students yet, since 2006 is the first graduating class that will be impacted by the exit exam requirement.

The state permits transfer students to submit passing scores from other state exams to meet the graduation requirement in Utah. The UBSCT Advisory Committee reviews other state exams on a case-by-case basis to determine their rigor and alignment with Utah proficiency requirements. Students who fail the exit exam are not allowed to earn a basic high school diploma by passing a substitute exam. The state does not currently have a provision for waivers or an appeals process, but it is considering the circumstances in which to grant waivers or establish appeals procedures. Students who do not receive a basic diploma may receive an alternative completion diploma if they have completed all course requirements and can document they made three attempts to take and pass all three subtests. Students who have completed their senior year and are exiting the school system but lack documentation of these three attempts or do not meet all course requirements for graduation may receive a certificate of completion. This certificate can be converted to a basic high school diploma whenever the individual achieves a passing score on all parts of the UBSCT.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Testing accommodations and modifications are allowed for students with disabilities who have an IEP or section 504 plan. In addition, the state has developed exit exam materials in Braille and large print. The same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. Students who pass the UBSCT exam using accommodations still receive a basic high school diploma.

Board rules R277-705-4 and R277-705-5 allow the IEP team to determine whether a student with a disability can participate in testing using the Utah Alternate Assessment. Students with disabilities who use the alternate assessment have satisfied the assessment requirement for an Alternative Completion Diploma and do not need to attempt or pass the UBSCT. Students with disabilities may also receive a certificate of completion, consistent with state and federal law and the student's IEP or section 504 plan.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations while testing, if these are identified in the student's ELL plan. These same accommodations are allowed for other statewide testing programs. Students who pass the UBSCT exam using accommodations still receive a basic high school diploma. However, there are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests that allow English language learners to receive a basic high school diploma, other than the alternatives allowed for all students. There are also no alternate certificates or diplomas for these students except the alternative completion diploma and the certificate of completion that is available to all students.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for too short a time. Utah does not have an official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but the state does not offer the UBSCT in languages other than English.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remedial services for students who do not pass the high school exit exam, but students are not required to attend remediation programs if they fail the exam. Remedial services are a local responsibility with implementation and requirement issues managed locally; therefore Utah does not target any funds to remediation for students who have failed the UBSCT. The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the UBSCT, help teachers learn how to teach test-taking skills, train teachers in how to interpret test results, and familiarize them with the content of the UBSCT. The state has also developed curriculum guides based on the exams and information guides explaining the tests. The state has developed a computer-based program through the Electronic High School to help students prepare for remediation and is considering releasing test items over the Internet.

Monitoring

There are no school and district accountability consequences and rewards linked to student performance on the exit exam.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in February 2005

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition
All students	72%	89%	78%
Male	72%	88%	73%
Female	72%	91%	83%
White	76%	93%	82%
Black	40%	71%	55%
Hispanic	42%	67%	50%
Asian	80%	87%	78%
Pacific Islander	58%	78%	68%
Native American	39%	69%	49%
English language learners/LEP	42%	65%	49%
Free or reduced-price lunch	55%	79%	63%
Students with disabilities	21%	53%	25%

Cumulative Pass Rates

There are no cumulative pass rates, since 2006 is the first graduating class that will be impacted by the exit exam requirement.

Graduation Rates

Utah uses a slightly modified version of the graduation rate formula recommended by the National Center for Education Statistics to ensure statewide comparability, since many Utah high schools contain only grades 10-12. The formula used is the cohort formula intended to simulate the movement of a class through high school. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduated from grade 12 in the current year by the sum of these same students and the number of students who dropped out of twelfth grade in the current year, eleventh grade in the prior year, and tenth grade in the year before that. Graduation data reported below are for the 2004 graduating cohort.

Subgroup	Graduation rate
All students	85.0%
White	87.6%
Black	67.5%
Hispanic	63.3%
Asian	87.5%
Pacific Islander	75.1%
American Indian	70.5%

Higher Education

Public universities and community colleges in Utah have not yet determined whether or how they will use the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test scores in their decision-making processes. There have been discussions between state K-12 education and higher education officials about using the UBSCT for admissions purposes, but no decisions have been reached. Higher education officials are represented on the UBSCT Advisory Committee.

Other High School Assessments

Utah has developed a statewide series of end-of-course exams. These criterion-referenced tests are part of the UPASS system and test students in reading, language arts, math, and science. The state does not administer any additional college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

Virginia

Test Name: Standards of Learning end-of-course exams

Subjects Tested: English: writing, English: reading, algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to the present, U.S. history, and world geography

Initial Grade Tested: Varies

Test Type: End-of-course

Stated Purpose of the Exam

Students in Virginia are required to accrue a specified number of standard credits and verified credits to earn a standard or advanced studies diploma. To earn a verified credit, the student must pass the class as well as the associated end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) test.

The regulations establishing standards for accrediting public schools in Virginia specify that a verified unit of credit for graduation “shall be based on a minimum of 140 clock hours of instruction, successful completion of the requirements of the course, and the achievement by the student of a passing score on the end-of-course SOL test for that course....”

The Standards of Quality in the Code of Virginia (§22.1-253.13:3) state in part that the state board of education should “provide, in the requirements for the verified units of credit stipulated for obtaining the standard or advanced studies diploma, that students completing elective classes into which the Standards of Learning for any required course have been integrated may take the relevant Standards of Learning test for the relevant required course and receive, upon achieving a satisfactory score on the specific Standards of Learning assessment, a verified unit of credit for such elective class that shall be deemed to satisfy the Board’s requirement for verified credit for the required course.”

In addition, the standards state, “The Board shall include in the student outcome measures which are required by the Standards for Accreditation, end-of-course or end-of-grade tests for various grade levels and classes, as determined by the Board, in accordance with the Standards of Learning. These Standards of Learning assessments shall include, but need not be limited to, end-of-course or end-of-grade tests for English, mathematics, science, and social studies.”

Historical and Policy Background

The state began administering the Standards of Learning tests in 1998 for all students completing a course for which there was an end-of-course test. Diplomas were withheld for the first time in 2004.

Prior to the SOL tests, the state administered the Literacy Passport Test, a minimum competency test, as a graduation requirement. This test is no longer being used, and there are currently no plans to use a test other than the SOL tests as an exit exam in the future.

Test Characteristics

The SOL tests are administered to students in summer, fall, and spring. The state considers the SOL exams to be end-of-course exams aligned to the content standards for a specific course. The exams were developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The state reports that committees of Virginia educators have reviewed each exit exam to determine whether the items are aligned to state standards. These committees review all test items and test forms to determine their match to the state content standards. Items are examined by committee before and after field testing, and test forms are reviewed to determine their match to the test blueprint before they are administered.

The SOL tests measure English: writing, English: reading, algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to the present, U.S. history, and world geography. Students in the ninth grade classes of 2000-01 through 2002-03 had to pass the English: reading and English: writing tests, as well as four tests in other subject areas, to be eligible for a standard diploma. Beginning with students entering ninth grade in 2003-04, students must pass the two end-of-course English tests, one test each in mathematics, history, and science, and one test of their own choosing to earn a standard diploma. The tests consist of multiple-choice questions and a response to a writing prompt on the English: writing test. None of the tests are timed. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math tests.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the SOLs to receive diplomas.

NCLB

Virginia began using the results from the first time a student takes the graduation tests in English: reading, algebra I, geometry, and algebra II to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002-03. The earth science, biology and chemistry tests will also be used for NCLB purposes beginning in 2007-08. The state plans to use the same cut scores for NCLB proficiency that it uses to award high school diplomas.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees grade the open-ended questions on the SOL tests. The performance levels for the exam are advanced, proficient, and fail/does not meet the standard. The tests are scored on a scale of 0-600, and students must achieve a scaled score of 400 to pass.

Once equating has occurred, electronic versions of results for students taking the paper version of the test are returned to school districts approximately two weeks after the scoring contractor receives answer documents. Scores for students taking SOL tests online are available within 24 hours, again assuming that equating has occurred. School districts are responsible for distributing score reports to parents. School districts are also asked to review the individual scores and make any necessary changes (such as correcting demographic data). If changes are required, a "record change" request is submitted to the state department of education. Once any necessary record changes are made, the school district authorizes the scoring contractor to develop the school and district summaries. The state report is made public once all school district summaries have been run; this usually occurs about three months after the last school district has finished testing. State results are reported to the public annually after the main spring administration. School districts on block schedules often report the results of the fall administration separately.

Students receive a score report indicating whether they have passed or failed, their subject area scores, their subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and their scores on individual test items. Student responses to the direct writing portion of the English: writing test are provided on CDs to school districts. If students fail an exit exam, the state or district is required to provide them with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.

Student Options

Students have three opportunities each year to retake sections of the exam before the end of grade 12. In addition, students who fail an end-of course exam with a score of 375-399 may immediately retake the test using an alternate form without waiting for the next regularly scheduled administration. Students who fail the test with scores of 374 or below may take the test again at the next regularly

scheduled administration. The state reports that it does not collect information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the SOL.

If students have not passed the exit exam but have met other graduation requirements, they are allowed to retake the exit exam after the twelfth grade and receive a diploma. There are no limits to the number of times a student takes the exam, as long as the student is no older than 20 for regular education students and 22 for special education students and English language learners. The state collects information on pass rates for students who take the test after twelfth grades but has not yet analyzed it, since the class of 2004 was the first graduating class held to the SOL verified credit requirements.

The state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Virginia. The state allows students to earn a regular high school diploma by passing a substitute test, such as the Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate tests, the SAT II, TOEFL, APIEL, Cambridge International Examinations, ACT, and CLEP. (For additional information, see <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/SubTestChart093004.pdf>.) In 2004, less than 1% of students used a substitute assessment to meet the graduation requirement. The state does not have a process for students who fail the exam to request a waiver or appeal the exit exam. However, students who do not receive a regular diploma are eligible to receive a certificate of completion or a GED.

The state is currently developing a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations during the exit exam that are identified in the student's IEP or section 504 plan. Accommodations include, but are not limited to, breaks during testing, individual or small group testing, reading aloud of test directions and test items in English, and use of a scribe. These same accommodations are allowed in other statewide testing programs. The state has also developed audio versions of the exams, as well as versions in Braille and large print. Students with disabilities who pass the exit exams using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests specifically for students with disabilities, although these students may use the same substitute tests as regular education students.

The state offers a Modified Standard Diploma for students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for a standard or advanced diploma but meet the credit and the numeracy and literacy requirements established by the state board of education. Recently, the state adjusted scores on the literacy and numeracy assessments required of special education students who are pursuing the modified standard diploma, and substitute tests were adopted for these literacy and numeracy assessments. The modified standard diploma is available only to special education students. These students can also receive a special diploma for students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for other diplomas but have completed the objectives in their IEP.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations while testing. Accommodations include, but are not limited to, breaks during testing, individual or small group testing, reading aloud of test directions and test items in English, and use of a scribe. These same accommodations are available in other statewide testing programs. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations will receive a regular high school diploma. Students must take all SOL tests in English; translations of the test into a different language are not permitted. There are no alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests for English language learners. There are also no special

diplomas or certificates, other than those available to all students, for English language learners who do not receive a regular diploma.

ELL students are not exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for too short a time. Virginia does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English reading and writing sections of the exit exam to receive a regular diploma. Consequently, the state does not offer the SOL tests in languages other than English.

Support Policies

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the SOL exams, although students are not required to attend remediation programs. For 2005-06, the state has allocated \$2.8 million for remediation for eleventh and twelfth grade students for the state's Project Graduation program. The funding is distributed based on district performance.

The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for exit exams, including activities to train teachers in teaching test-taking skills, train teachers how to interpret results, familiarize teachers with the content of the exam, and help them use instructional strategies based on resources developed through the department of education. The state has also developed curriculum guides based on exams and lesson plans to prepare students for the tests. Practice tests with annotations are also available for teachers and students, along with an online tutorial for English: reading. The state has also developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for students, such as after-school tutorials, weekend tutorial programs, computer-based programs, and summer school. Examples of these include:

- Continuation academies were offered in summer 2004 to provide students with remediation and give them additional opportunities to take the needed assessments.
- A General Achievement Diploma (GAD) was established by the General Assembly that allows students who are at least 18 years of age with 20 standard units of credit to take (and pass) the GED to earn the GAD.
- The Algebra Readiness Initiative provides funding for intervention programs for students who need additional instruction to be successful in algebra I. The initiative includes access to a diagnostic test to be used to determine the areas of weakness for the student so appropriate intervention can occur.

The electronic Practice Assessment Tool (ePAT) is available for student use. This tool uses the released SOL assessments in English: reading, English: writing (multiple-choice), algebra I, geometry, and grade 8 English: reading in an online format that allows students to practice taking the tests before either their first administration or a retake. The tool provides feedback to the students through annotations that explain which answers are correct and incorrect. It is available on the Virginia Department of Education Web site and is free for all students and teachers to use.

Monitoring

Schools may be recognized by the state board for high performance in accordance with procedures established by the Virginia Board of Education. Recognition may include public announcements recognizing individual schools, tangible rewards, waivers of certain state regulations, exemptions from certain reporting requirements, or other commendations deemed appropriate to recognize high achievement. Schools may also be eligible to receive the Governor's Award for outstanding improvements. Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exam.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2003-04

Subgroup	Math	English	Writing	Science	History
All students	84%	89%	89%	81%	83%
Male	83%	88%	86%	82%	85%
Female	84%	91%	92%	79%	81%
White	88%	93%	93%	88%	88%
Black	71%	80%	80%	64%	70%
Hispanic	76%	83%	82%	66%	74%
American Indian	82%	87%	86%	82%	80%
Asian	92%	92%	91%	85%	90%
English language learners/ LEP	78%	75%	68%	58%	71%
Students with disabilities	59%	68%	57%	56%	60%
Free and reduced-price lunch	75%	80%	80%	65%	68%

Cumulative Pass Rates

Statewide data on cumulative pass rates are not available.

Graduation Rates for 2002-03

Virginia has historically calculated a graduation rate defined as “graduates as a percent of ninth-grade membership four years earlier.” As of 2003, Virginia calculated a graduation rate for high schools that includes in the denominator all recipients of any type of certificate or diploma, as well as students who have dropped out of or transferred into a high school, and includes in the numerator only those students who receive a standard diploma in the standard number of years, excluding those who receive a special diploma, modified standard diploma, certificate of attendance, or GED certificate. Because Virginia does not have a student record system, this calculation does not account for schools opening and closing, boundary changes, and the mobility of the student population. Therefore, when disaggregated by school and student subgroup, the rate produces unreliable results. Virginia is currently developing a student record system that will enable the state to calculate a true longitudinal rate that is based on a cohort of first-time ninth graders plus incoming transfers on the same schedule to graduate, divided by this same cohort minus students who transfer out. This new formula is similar to that used by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Subgroup	Graduation rate
All students	81.9%
Male	78.5%
Female	85.4%
White	84.5%
Black	75.2%
Hispanic	72.2%

Higher Education

Public universities and community colleges in Virginia do not use the SOL for admissions, scholarships, or course placement. Students can be admitted into public community colleges without receiving a high school diploma as long as they meet other entrance requirements.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any other end-of-course exams beside those used as exit exams, nor does it include college readiness exams in its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education Web site, July 2005.

Washington

Test Name: Washington Assessment of Student Learning

Subjects Tested: English language arts and mathematics

Initial Grade Tested: 10

Test Type: Standards-based

Stated Purpose of the Exam

The Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA), based upon student achievement on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), is “evidence that students have successfully met state standards in the content areas” of reading, writing, and math, and, in 2010, science.

Historical and Policy Background

The state of Washington is phasing in an exit exam called the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in reading, writing, and math. Washington already administers the WASL, but the class of 2008 will be the first class required to pass the exam to receive a diploma. The state decided to no longer require the listening test and to add science as a graduation requirement in 2010.

Third Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2195 (3ESHB), which passed the legislature in 2004, elaborated on the conditions for taking the WASL in order for students to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement. This legislation also set the exam retake policies and authorized the state to design an additional assessment option for students who have the necessary skills but experience difficulty demonstrating those abilities on the WASL.

There are no plans to replace the WASL at this time.

Test Characteristics

Students take the exam in March and April. The state considers the WASL to be a standards-based exam aligned to grade 10 standards. It was developed collaboratively by the state and a testing company. The math test has undergone an external review by SRI International to determine its alignment to state standards. The reading, writing, and science tests are currently undergoing a similar review, scheduled to be completed by November 2005 and November 2006 (science). The state also commissioned a broad study of exit exams and students’ opportunity to learn in the state. The study covered the extent to which curriculum and instruction are aligned to exit exams. Technical manuals for the WASL are available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/TestAdministration.aspx>.

The WASL tests science, math, reading, and writing. The tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay questions, and extended/performance tasks. The tests are not timed. All students are allowed to use calculators on some parts of the math test.

Students in private schools and home-schooled students are not required to pass the WASL to receive diplomas.

NCLB

The state is using the initial tenth grade administration of the WASL to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. All of the reading and math items are used, and the writing test can be used with reading only for NCLB purposes to create a combined “language arts” score. The results of the reading exam were first used in the 2002-03 school year for NCLB purposes, and the science results will be included in 2010. The same passing score will be used for NCLB accountability and high school graduation, once the exit exam requirement takes effect.

Scoring and Reporting

Testing company employees with college degrees score the open-ended questions on the exam using rubrics established by Washington educators. The scales for test scores are equated from year to year, so that students need a 400 in English language arts, math, and science to meet the standard. Students need a raw score of 17 in writing to meet the standard. The performance levels for reading and math are levels I and II, "does not meet the standard"; level III, "meets the standard"; and level IV, "exceeds the standard." As of 2005, the same four levels apply in writing. The initial results are reported to districts and schools two and one-half months after test administration and to students, parents, and the public three and one-half months after testing. Official results are reported to the public in late August. However, minor corrections are made and the final results are posted on the public website after the official release. Reports include information about whether the student passes or fails and the scores and subscores of skills and content under each major subject area. Some of the test questions with sample student responses are posted on the Internet and distributed to districts each year.

Slight changes were made in the cut scores for the three subjects beginning in 2005, as follows:

- Math: no change in passing score (Level III), higher cut score for advanced (Level IV), lower cut score for basic (Level II)
- Reading: lower passing score (Level III), higher cut score for advanced (Level IV), no change in cut score for basic (Level II)
- Writing: no change in passing cut score (Level III), established cut scores to create four levels

The state has a system of student-level identifiers for tracking achievement results and other student data and, beginning in 2005, WASL scores will now appear on student transcripts.

Student Options

Once the CAA is required for graduation, students who do not meet the standard can retake the exam twice a year, starting in the summer after the first spring administration. The state legislature approved up to four state-funded retakes for students who have not met the standard, and students may continue to retake the test at their own expense after they exceed the statutory limits. Students may also retake the test at their own expense if they have met the standard but wish to improve their score. If students have completed all other graduation requirements but have not passed the graduation test by the end of grade 12, they may retake it. The state does not collect information on pass rates for such students, since the CAA is not yet required for graduation.

Schools are required to provide "student learning plans" for students who have not met the standard in one or more content areas; these plans must include actions the student and the school will take to meet standards and stay on track for graduation. The state reports that it does not yet collect information on the number of times students attempt to pass each section of the WASL. Under 3ESHB 2195, the state must recommend alternative assessments, including a possible appeals process for students who have not met state standards on the WASL. These alternative measures must have comparable rigor. To be eligible for an alternative means of testing or the appeals process, students must retake the WASL at least once. Specific details of the appeals process are still being worked out. Currently the state does not permit transfer students to submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet graduation requirements in Washington. This is being considered, however, as an option in the development of the appeals process.

Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

The state allows an extensive number of accommodations for students with disabilities, as long as they are specified in the student's IEP or Section 504 plan. These accommodations, which include extended time, use of physical supports, and oral answers, are similar to those allowed on other statewide tests. (The main exceptions have to do with accommodations on the writing portion of the WASL and the use of calculators, which is allowed on WASL but not on other statewide tests.) In addition, the state has developed exit exam materials in Braille and large print.

Students with disabilities who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities for whom the WASL is not appropriate have the option of using other assessments to demonstrate skills and abilities commensurate with their IEPs. There is also an alternate assessment for students with disabilities (the Washington Alternate Assessment System, or WAAS), but these students are not required to attempt the WASL first. Students with disabilities who use alternate assessments to demonstrate skills and abilities earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement and can still receive a regular high school diploma.

English Language Learners

The state allows English language learners to use accommodations including having instructions read in the student's native language; having test items read in English, except for the reading WASL, which cannot be read aloud; and using a dictionary or thesaurus. These accommodations are similar to those allowed on other statewide tests with the main exceptions applying to accommodations (such as the use of a dictionary or thesaurus) on the writing portion of the WASL. English language learners who pass the exit exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma. There are no special alternate routes, waivers, exclusions, or substitute tests aimed exclusively at helping ELLs obtain a regular high school diploma, outside of the options available to all students. There are no special certificates for ELLs who do not pass the WASL, nor does Washington have any special program or assistance targeted to ELL students to help them pass the exit exam.

ELL students are exempt from taking the state exit exam because they lack English language proficiency or have been enrolled in U.S. schools for just a short time, but only for the first time they are scheduled to take the WASL; by 2008, they must still pass the test to graduate. Washington does not have a law or official policy stating that students must be competent in the English language to receive a high school diploma, but competency in English is still required, in that all students must pass the English language arts section of the exit exam to receive a diploma. Consequently, the state does not offer the WASL in languages other than English.

Support Policies

Beginning in fall 2005, the state will require school districts to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the WASL, although students will not be required to attend remediation programs. The state requires school districts to prepare plans for students who do not pass the required WASL tests. These plans must include courses, competencies, and steps needed to meet the standards and stay on track for graduation. These plans are to be shared with the student's parent, preferably through a conference. Washington indicated that no funds are targeted specifically on remediation for students who fail the exam, although the legislature in 2005 provided an additional \$25 million for the state's Learning Assistance Program to help raise achievement among low-income students in high school. The state has supported programs to train teachers how to interpret test results and familiarize teachers with the content of the WASL, and has developed information guides explaining the tests. The state has also developed sample tests for students and releases some test items each year.

Monitoring

Aside from NCLB accountability requirements, there are no accountability consequences or rewards for schools and districts linked to student performance on the exit exams.

Student Outcomes

Pass Rates for First-time Test-takers in 2003-04

Subgroups	Math	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing Composition	Science
All students	44.0%	64.6%	65.4%	32.3%
Male	44.0%	59.6%	57.2%	33.9%
Female	44.0%	70.6%	74.6%	31.1%
White	49.2%	69.6%	69.7%	37.4%
Black	16.0%	42.8%	48.9%	9.2%
Hispanic	19.6%	41.3%	42.5%	11.1%
Asian	52.2%	70.5%	73.4%	33.6%
Native American	23.3%	46.4%	46.8%	14.9%
English language learners/LEP	9.7%	16.8%	17.3%	2.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch	24.6%	46.1%	47.4%	14.6%
Students with disabilities	5.5%	15.3%	15.0%	3.8%
Migrant	10.9%	27.5%	28.2%	4.1%

Cumulative Pass Rates

The pass rate for all students in the class of 2004 (those who first took the test in 2002) is 30.2%. This rate reflects the percentage of students who passed all sections of the exam. The rate does not include any retakes, since the exams are not yet required for graduation, and data were not available for subgroups of students.

Graduation Rates

The graduation rate shown below represents the percentage of students graduating from high school with a regular or adult diploma in four years. This rate is calculated by dividing the total number of students in the cohort graduating with a regular or adult diploma by the total number of students in the cohort. Deceased students or those who transferred out of the state are removed from the cohort.

Graduation Rates for 2002-03

Subgroups	Rate
All students	66%
Male	62%
Female	70%
White	70%
Black	48%
Hispanic	50%
Asian	71%
Native American	42%
English language learners/LEP	50%
Free or reduced-price lunch	59%
Students with disabilities	50%

Higher Education

State and local officials and faculty from K-12 and higher education have been working to align K-12 standards with the knowledge and skills students need to be ready for college. The state legislature in 2004 passed legislation requiring alignment of K-12 standards with standards for college readiness, spurred by the desire to decrease the remediation rates of recent high school graduates at colleges and universities. State officials have also had discussions with the state's four-year colleges about using the WASL as part of the recruitment, scholarship, and admissions process. Several studies found that WASL results have about the same power to predict a college freshman's grades as do college entrance exams like the SAT.

Other High School Assessments

The state does not administer any additional end-of-course or college readiness examinations as part of its assessment program.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from and verified by state assessment personnel and the state department of education website, July 2005.

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