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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is the 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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In school year 2002–03, state exit examinations were put to the test. Public resistance to mandatory exit exams mounted, as diplomas were withheld from thousands of students and as high initial failure rates set off alarms in states scheduled to begin withholding diplomas in the next few years. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) began to take effect, putting considerable demands on state testing systems at all grades and complicating states’ efforts to maintain key features of their exit exams. More evidence also emerged about the impacts and costs of exit exams, making clearer to states—if they didn’t know it already—that exit exams are no cheap or easy fix for education reform. Despite these pressures, states are pushing ahead with exit exams, although not always as quickly or smoothly as they had hoped.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

This is the second 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 based on information we collected from all states with current or planned exit exams, on our own research, and on our review of other major research in this field. This year we reached four main findings:

■ Over the past year, states have generally kept the core requirements of their exit exam systems intact and are forging ahead with these tests. While several states have revised or delayed their exit exam requirements in response to public opposition, high failure rates, and concerns about negative effects of tests on minority, poor, and special needs students, most of the adjustments made have
affected small numbers of students or bought states time to fix problems with
the tests before diplomas are withheld. The debates over these changes show
how complicated it is to strike a balance that addresses legitimate concerns
about the exams without losing their rigor.

- The federal No Child Left Behind Act is influencing the performance goals, con-
tent, and timetables of state exit exam systems. Most states with current or
planned exit exams intend to use these exams to comply with the Act’s high
school testing mandates, but most must modify their testing systems to do so.
States with exit exams that cannot be easily adapted to NCLB requirements must
decide whether to scrap their exams or forge ahead with two sets of high school
tests. While the challenges will not exactly be the same, the state experience with
exit exams offers a preview of the types of funding, educational tradeoffs, and
public buy-in issues that will be involved in carrying out the NCLB provisions.

- Exit exams appear to encourage school districts to cover more of the content
in state standards, better align curriculum with state standards, and add reme-
dial and other special courses for students at risk of failing. But a moderate
amount of evidence also suggests these exams may be associated with higher
dropout rates. This accumulating evidence about the impacts of exit exams can
help states and school districts better understand the tradeoffs to consider when
deciding whether an exit exam will meet their reform goals or designing poli-
cies and programs to help students pass these tests.

- The current costs of implementing an exit exam policy are substantial—in
Indiana they come to about 5.5% of current expenditures for K-12 education,
according to a new study done for this report. The costs of raising student test
scores to meet state performance targets are even greater, amounting to an addi-
tional 8.5% of state K-12 expenditures in Indiana. States have made little pro-
vision for the “hidden” costs of exit exams, such as costs for teacher professional
development and prevention programs for students at risk of failing. In fact,
many states are expecting school districts to foot most of the bill.

This chapter gives a broad overview of our main findings and makes recom-
mendations for state and national policymakers.

The Growing Influence of Exit Exams

State exit exams—tests that students must pass to graduate from high school—are
more influential than ever. As Figure 1 shows, 19 states had mandatory exit exams
in 2003—one more than last year with the addition of Massachusetts. Five more
states plan to phase in these tests by 2008. More than half (52%) of all public school
students and an even greater share (55%) of minority public school students cur-
cently live in states with exit exam requirements. If states stick to their plans, exit
exams will affect roughly 7 in 10 public school students and 8 in 10 minority stu-
dents by 2008, based on enrollment data from the National Center for Education
Striking a Balance in Response to Opposition

Opposition to exit exams intensified in 2003, as their effects became more visible and widely felt. This year, Massachusetts withheld diplomas for the first time from students who failed exit exams, and six other states (Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, and New York) added new subject tests to their exit exams or replaced older basic skills tests with new exams geared to higher standards. In these and other states, reports of low pass rates and large numbers of students on the verge of being denied diplomas attracted media attention and fueled public concerns about the tests.

Faced with anxious students, irate parents, vocal critics, and intense media coverage, state policymakers tried to find ways in 2003 to soften public resistance to exit exams and minimize harm to students, while keeping the core elements of their exam systems intact. During the past year, numerous states have amended, postponed, or changed their exit exam systems to address concerns or opposition. States have come up with various approaches, including the following:

- **WAIVERS AND ALTERNATIVES.** Several states have created waivers, special exemptions, or alternative routes to a diploma for students who have failed exit exams after repeated tries. Florida was one such state. When faced with the possibility that 12,500 students in the state would not graduate this year because they failed the state exit exam, Florida policymakers enacted a measure to allow high school seniors who have failed its exit exam to substitute scores on a different standardized test, such as the SAT or American College Test (ACT).
entrance exams, as a condition for graduation. Earlier in the year, Florida had already decided to grant waivers of the exit exam requirement for some students with disabilities who could not pass the test.

- **DELAYS.** Some states are delaying requirements to withhold diplomas, as Alaska and Arizona already did last year. In May 2003, the Maryland state board of education voted to bump its exit exam graduation requirement for the new exam the state is phasing in from 2007 to 2008. In July 2003, the California state school board postponed its exit exam mandate from 2004 until 2006, after an independent study reported that one-fifth of the class of 2004 could be denied diplomas as a result of failing the exam (Wise et al., 2003).

- **LOWERING CUT SCORES.** A few states took steps in 2003 to lower the minimum scores needed to pass their exit exams. After only 36% of Nevada students passed the math test of the state exit exam on the first try, Nevada temporarily lowered the cut score on the test from 304 to 290, although a more drastic proposal to suspend the math test altogether was unsuccessful (Richmond, 2003, June 10). In Texas, which is scheduled to begin withholding diplomas in 2005 for its new exam, concerns about low pass rates led the state board of education to agree to phase in proposed higher cut scores over two years.

- **VOIDED TEST RESULTS.** In June 2003, the New York commissioner of education nullified the results of the state’s controversial Regents exam in math—which many educators and students said was inordinately difficult—as a condition for graduation, allowing local school authorities to award diplomas to individual seniors who failed that test but had passed the requisite course based on the state’s math standards and were otherwise qualified to graduate.

- **SUSPENSION OF NEW MANDATES.** Concerned that its proposed new end-of-course tests might not comply with the No Child Left Behind Act, the Georgia state board of education decided to make these proposed tests into diagnostic tools instead of mandatory exit exams. The current state exit exam, which is generally viewed as easier than the end-of-course tests, will remain in place as a graduation requirement. Similarly, the North Carolina House voted to indefinitely suspend implementation of a new exit exam that had been scheduled for its first administration in 2004—an action motivated partly by concern that the new exam would not comply with the requirements of NCLB.

- **NO CHANGES.** Some states have made no major changes in exit exams, despite public criticism. When Louisiana switched to a new test in 2003, initial pass rates dropped from 74% to 65% of test-takers in math and from 81% to 78% in English. But like neighboring Mississippi, the state has held fast to its current requirements.

In several cases, debates about whether to amend exit exam requirements were contentious and highly politicized. State leaders who had advocated exit exams as a necessary remedy for inferior schools and apathetic students searched for ways to keep graduation rates at an acceptable level and avoid massive backlash, while not appearing to back down from their commitment to rigorous standards. Often policymakers disagreed about whether a particular proposal would water down exam requirements too much.
The range of state responses shows how difficult it is to strike the right balance that makes necessary adjustments to address valid concerns but does not strip the requirements of their teeth. If states take a hard-line stance and make minimal or no changes, diplomas could be withheld from large numbers of students, and public opposition to the exams could grow to the point that it undermines the whole test-based reform movement. But if states bow too much to public pressure, the rigor of the exams will be diminished and their value as a reform tool will be lost.

So far, most of the adjustments made by states have affected a limited number of students and have kept the core exam requirements intact. The delays in state mandates have bought time for all affected parties to prepare for the exams and monitor their effects before serious consequences are applied to students. It remains to be seen, however, whether the actions of 2003 will prove to be reasonable adaptations that ultimately strengthen state exit exam systems or the first sign of erosion in states’ commitment to test-based reform.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act, which began taking effect in 2002, is more prescriptive than any previous federal law about how often states must test, what kinds of tests they must administer, and how they must use the results. At the high school level, the Act requires states to test all students at least once between grades 10 and 12. These tests must cover reading and mathematics by school year 2005-06 and science by school year 2007-08, but they do not have to be exit exams tied to graduation.

Although exit exams hold weightier consequences for students, NCLB has greater consequences for schools. The Act requires steady annual or multi-year increases in test scores among every major subgroup of students—including minority students, poor children, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs)—and sets a goal of virtually all students in all these subgroups meeting state standards of proficiency by 2014. Title I schools that do not make adequate yearly progress in test scores will be subject to corrective actions.

In a sense, the Act is a federal overlay on state-developed testing and accountability systems that have been years in the making. How well these federal mandates fit with state exit exam policies varies by state. According to the Center’s state survey, most states with current or planned exit exams intend to use these tests to comply with the NCLB high school testing requirements. But conforming exit exams to the Act’s stipulations is no simple task. As explained in more detail in chapter 5, states had to make hard choices about whether to aim for a 100% pass rate on their exit exams by 2014, which scores to count for NCLB accountability when a student takes an exit exam more than once, how much to change the exam’s content and phase-in schedules to conform with NCLB mandates, and how to ensure that exit exams do not adversely affect graduation rates, which are another measure of school progress under NCLB.

In some cases, as in the Georgia and North Carolina examples mentioned above, state exit exams may be too different in content, goals, or timetables to be easily adapted to the NCLB requirements. In these situations, states must decide whether to scrap their planned exit exams or spend money and time developing
and administering two sets of high school tests—one to meet federal requirements and another to accomplish state objectives.

Despite these differences, both NCLB and state exit exams represent attempts to use high-stakes testing to improve performance. Because of this similarity, the state experience with exit exams offers a preview of the pressures, funding and instructional tradeoffs, and other challenges states and school districts will confront as they carry out NCLB. In fact, the costs and tradeoffs will be much greater with NCLB than with exit exams because NCLB has a much broader reach. Many states have already missed an opportunity to apply lessons from exit exams to their plans for determining adequate yearly progress under NCLB, but this is all the more reason they should not miss future opportunities.

For example, based on the exit exam experience, states should expect both positive and negative impacts from NCLB and should begin to look for and respond to both. States that have made an effort to raise pass rates on exit exams will also have a better understanding of the kinds of professional development, interventions, and preventive services required to raise achievement, especially among low-performing students. States that have analyzed the exit exam experience will understand that the costs of test-based reform are much higher than many people expect.

Finally, states can learn lessons from the exit exam experience about the political fallout, public pressures, and even legal challenges that arise when test scores do not improve as quickly or as much as expected. They will appreciate the importance of promoting public understanding of and securing public buy-in for testing programs and be better prepared to deal with public scrutiny and anti-testing backlash.

Impacts of Exit Exams

In 2003, evidence continued to emerge about the positive and negative effects of exit exams, which will help states better understand the tradeoffs involved in mandating these tests.

On the plus side, these exams appear to be changing curriculum and instruction in ways that have led to greater internal curriculum alignment and focus within districts and schools. As described in chapter 2, an independent study of California’s exit exam program found that the tests seemed to be encouraging schools to cover more of the content in state standards, to better align curriculum with state standards, and to add remedial and other special courses for students who have failed or are at risk of failing the exams (Wise et al., 2003). The California study also suggested that exit exam pass rates in individual high schools are closely related to how well the school curriculum covers the tested standards. Other studies have noted less positive effects on curriculum and instruction, however, such as squeezing out content not covered by the tests and encouraging teachers to cover a breadth of content rather than teaching fewer topics in more depth (Clarke, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, Miao & Li, 2003; Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos & Miao, 2003).

On the minus side, several recent studies (e.g., Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Jacob, 2001; Warren & Edwards, 2003) offer a moderate degree of evidence that exit exams are associated with higher dropout rates. Other studies have found no such link (e.g., Carnoy & Loeb, 2003; Davenport, Davison, Kwak, Irish, & Chan, 2002),
but in any case, the research to date makes plain that exit exams are certainly not helping to keep students in school.

Although this evidence about the impacts of exit exams is not conclusive, it can help states with current or planned exit exams evaluate the possible tradeoffs involved and try to avert any negative effects. It can also help states without exit exams make better decisions about whether this type of exam would meet their education reform goals.

For example, the California evaluation provides important lessons for other states about the potential for exit exams to spur real instructional change in the classroom and the significant amount of time it takes for support systems to work broadly for all students. Many states are not allowing enough time or providing enough teacher preparation or professional development and other supports for exam-based reforms to be as effective as they could.

To cite another example, the findings about dropout rates suggest that states may need to mitigate possible negative effects by setting up more sophisticated systems to monitor dropout rates and track what happens to those who drop out and by providing stronger supports for students at risk of dropping out. States may also need to examine their reform agenda more broadly to see whether other educational policies adopted at the same time as exit exams—such as adding course requirements or lowering the age at which students can get a GED—could interact with the exams to exacerbate dropout rates.

Costs of Exit Exams

The current costs of implementing exit exams are substantial, and the costs of raising test scores to meet state performance targets will be even greater, according to a study of exit exam costs commissioned by the Center for this report and described in chapter 4. Using Indiana as a case study, this analysis by Douglas Rose and John Myers (2003) developed a new method, based on input from panels of education and finance experts, to estimate the costs of implementing exit exams.

The study concluded that the direct costs of developing and administering the tests themselves represent a small share of the total costs of implementing a mandatory exit exam policy. A realistic estimate of exam-related costs must also take into account the costs of remediation for students who fail exit exams or crucial state tests in earlier grades, as well as the “hidden” costs of services needed to give students a substantial chance of passing these tests. These latter costs include professional development for teachers who must prepare students to pass the tests and preventive services to raise achievement at all grade levels. Examples of prevention include revamping instruction to align it with state standards, instituting early reading and math programs to prevent failure, and implementing special instructional methods to help English language learners and students with disabilities learn the knowledge and skills being tested.

Our commissioned study estimated that it costs $442 million annually, or $444 per pupil per year, to achieve the current level of performance on Indiana’s exit exam. To raise achievement on the Indiana exam to the state standard of “commendable” performance (which, among other things, would mean raising initial
pass rates in either math or language arts from 68% to 80%) would cost an extra $682 million annually, or $685 per pupil per year—on top of the $442 million. Viewed another way, the current costs of exit exams equal about 5.5% of Indiana’s 2001-02 expenditures for elementary and secondary education, while the additional costs for higher performance would amount to another 8.5% of the state’s annual education budget.

At the current performance level, only 18% of the costs of exit exams are attributable to direct testing expenses. The largest share of the costs (29%) goes toward remediation, but the costs of professional development and prevention together make up more than half the total. As the exit exam program matures and the focus shifts to raising performance, the distribution of these costs changes, with about three-fourths going toward prevention and professional development and about one-fourth toward remediation and direct testing costs.

Who is footing the bill? In Indiana, dedicated state funding for exit exams and remediation covers only about 3% of the current estimated costs of implementing the exams, according to our commissioned study. The remainder is being picked up by school districts—primarily by reallocating existing funds toward programs focused on the test performance of low-achieving students and away from subjects not tested or students with less urgent needs. This means that districts are being affected differentially, with greater costs for districts with students whose performance is lagging and teachers in need of additional professional development.

Evidence from the Center’s own state survey suggests that Indiana is not an anomaly. Although many states did not answer our survey question about whether they fully fund remediation services for students who fail exit exams, only two of those that did said they paid for all of the costs of remediation (which, according to the Indiana study, constitute less than a third of the total current costs of exit exams). Five of the responding states reported that they covered no remediation costs at all, while the others fell somewhere in between providing a substantial share and providing nothing.

When it comes to raising performance, the costs are clearly far more than many school districts can cover with existing funds. As average test scores keep improving, it will take more intensive and specialized services, with higher per pupil costs, to raise pass rates, because the students who have not yet passed will increasingly consist of those with the greatest learning difficulties. Meeting the achievement goals of state exit exams will require greater investments from all levels of government.

The problem, however, is that these costs are coming at a time when many states are in dire financial straits. Governors, who have often been among the strongest supporters of exit exams, are preoccupied with finding enough money to cover large shortfalls in state budgets. In fact, the temptation may arise to cut or delay planned exit exam programs to save money. Utah, for example, is considering cutting out its exit exam, partly in response to budget problems. What happens with state budgets over the next year may determine whether exit exam programs survive at all.

Many of the findings from the Indiana analysis also apply to costs of the high-stakes testing required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Meeting the NCLB goals will entail expenditures for remediation, prevention, and professional development,
much like exit exams, and will involve similar funding tradeoffs. If anything, the costs of achieving the NCLB agenda will be greater because the goals are more ambitious. If the nation expects school districts to raise achievement across the board and for all subgroups of students, as envisioned by NCLB, then national policymakers must also provide significant new funding.

Action Steps for Policymakers

By studying exit exams, the Center hopes to help states apply research findings to future policy decisions and learn from the experiences of other states. In this spirit, we have several recommendations for actions policymakers can take to strengthen exit exam systems. Some of these actions are also applicable to national policymakers.

1. **STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE.** States should try to strike a balance in their approach to amending exit exam programs. This balance should recognize that adjustments will sometimes be necessary to address unexpected consequences or prevent unfair harm to students but should guard against watering down requirements too much simply because there is opposition. States should monitor the effects of exit exams and take steps to minimize negative effects while giving the core reforms time to work.

2. **REMEDIATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, PREVENTION.** Every state exit exam program should be accompanied by a meaningful system of supports for students at risk of failing to meet state standards. This system should include remediation for students who have failed exit exams or performed poorly on state tests in earlier grades; professional development to help teachers prepare students for the exams; and prevention services, beginning in the elementary grades, for students with low achievement. The system should also include other valid ways for students who repeatedly fail exit exams to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and earn a diploma.

3. **ADEQUATE STATE CONTRIBUTIONS.** States should stop treating exit exams as if they are a low-cost or no-cost solution to educational problems. States should not expect school districts to bear the lion’s share of the costs of implementing exit exams. If states expect exit exams to improve instruction and raise achievement, they should contribute more to the costs of remediation, professional development, and prevention.

4. **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND.** As they implement the No Child Left Behind Act, state and national policymakers should recognize that NCLB will involve tradeoffs similar to those faced by states with exit exams—for example, schools may shift their instructional focus to content that is tested and students who need extra help. As with exit exams, policymakers should anticipate and prepare for both positive and negative impacts from NCLB. Leaders should also understand that raising student achievement at all grades, as required by NCLB, will entail higher costs and a more substantial investment in remediation, professional development, and prevention than it takes to prepare students for exit exams. Finally, policymakers should devote significant effort to building public support for NCLB testing goals, even as they recognize that some anti-testing backlash and political pressures are bound to arise.
5. **REPORTING RESULTS.** States should make an effort to provide more timely, detailed, and easily understood exit exam results for students, teachers, schools, districts, and the public. To the extent that their budgets and administrative capacity allow, states should report exit exam results as overall totals and also broken down by subgroups and by the number of times students have taken the test. States should also monitor the number of students who do not pass all of the required tests by their last opportunity in grade 12 and are therefore denied a diploma.

6. **MONITORING IMPACTS.** State and national policymakers should create better systems for monitoring dropout rates and other possible effects of exit exams. States should form consortia to establish uniform methods of defining, collecting, and reporting dropout data, so information can be more readily transferred and compared among states. States should develop mechanisms for tracking the post-high-school outcomes of young people who earned regular diplomas versus those who received certificates of attendance, and researchers should place a high priority on studying the effects of exit exams on student achievement.

**Methodology of the Study**

This report is a product of the Center’s comprehensive multi-year study of exit exams, conducted with funding from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the William T. Grant Foundation, and, in upcoming years of the report, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It focuses on developments that have occurred and research findings that have been released or publicized since the Center’s report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Baseline Report*, which was issued in August 2002.

For this 2003 study of high school exit exams, the Center on Education Policy used a variety of research methods. As our primary research tool, we developed and conducted surveys of both state department of education officials and higher education officials. The state education department officials we surveyed were usually from the state’s assessment department, and the higher education officials were either from state higher education commissions or the admissions offices of state university and community college systems. In April and May 2003, we contacted these officials and asked them to fill out surveys and verify information we had collected and reported in our 2002 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 to ensure that we had accurately portrayed states’ testing systems.

All 24 states with current or planned exit exams responded to our survey, although not every state answered every question in the survey. This was 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 of this report because events in this field move so quickly.

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 websites for exit exam developments.

Douglas Rose and John Myers, the researchers who conducted a commissioned study for the Center on exit exam costs in Indiana, developed a special methodology to determine cost information. Their methods are described in chapter 4 of this report.

Organization of This Report
The report is organized as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses the effects of state exit exams on curriculum and instruction and on students.
- Chapter 3 describes the main features of exit exams as they existed in 2003.
- Chapter 4 analyzes the costs of exit exams.
- Chapter 5 explores several challenges facing states as they implement exit exams in 2003.

A “highlights” section at the beginning of each chapter summarizes the key findings of the chapter. The State Profiles section at the end of this report presents data and descriptions of exit exams systems in all 24 states that have or plan to have mandatory exit exams by 2008.
How Are Exit Exams Affecting Curriculum, Instruction, and Students?

HIGHLIGHTS

■ New studies suggest that exit exams are having both positive and negative effects on curriculum and instruction. On the plus side, these exams seem to be encouraging schools to cover more of the content in state standards, better align curricula with state standards, and add remedial and other special courses for students who have failed or are at risk of failing the exams. On the minus side, many educators report that exit exams and high-stakes testing are squeezing out any content not covered by the tests, encouraging breadth of coverage instead of depth, and promoting a curriculum sequence and a pace that are not appropriate for some students.

■ Recent studies disagree about whether exit exams help to increase student achievement. Some researchers have found no pattern of achievement gains in states with exit exams on measures other than the exams themselves, while others have concluded that high-stakes tests have contributed to achievement gains.

■ On balance, recent studies of the impact of exit exams on dropout rates offer a moderate degree of evidence suggesting that these exams are associated with higher dropout rates. At the same time, the research to date offers no evidence that exit exams decrease dropout rates—in other words, exit exams are not helping to keep students in school.

■ The percentage of students passing exit exams on the first try varies by state, subject, and subgroup, but for many states, these initial pass rates are in the range of 65% to 85% of students. Pass rates are significantly lower, however, for African American and Hispanic students and for poor students, children with disabilities, and English language learners. Data from a handful of states suggest that the large majority of students—about 90%—eventually pass these exams in time to
graduate, although these numbers do not reflect students who may have dropped out along the way. Racial, ethnic, and income disparities in pass rates appear to shrink with additional opportunities for retesting, but do not go away.

New Research on the Impact of Exit Exams

In 2002, the Center on Education Policy reported that evidence from existing studies was mixed and inconclusive about whether exit exams have a more positive or negative impact, on balance. On the critical question of whether exit exams improve student achievement, the evidence we reviewed for our 2002 report was mixed. On the equally important question of whether exit exams increase dropout rates, several—but not all—of the studies we analyzed for that report concluded that exit exams are associated with higher dropout rates, although the causal connections are unclear.

In recent months, the debate over the impact of exit exams has intensified with the release of several major new studies. Although the findings are still mixed and far from conclusive, researchers are taking a greater interest in investigating the consequences of exit exams and other high-stakes testing policies—a hopeful sign that in future years we will better understand these impacts.

This chapter reviews research findings that have been released or publicized since the Center’s 2002 report. It looks at evidence about the impact of exit exams in two main areas:

■ Curriculum and instruction; and

■ Outcomes for students, including student attitudes and motivation, student achievement, dropout rates, and pass rates.

Impact on Curriculum and Instruction

New studies continue to show that exit exams and other high-stakes tests are influencing curriculum and instruction in both positive and negative ways.

On the positive side, standards-based exit exams seem to be encouraging teachers to spend more time teaching the content in state standards—presumably the most important content for students to learn. As part of a legislatively mandated evaluation of California’s exit exam, an independent research group called the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) surveyed teachers and administrators in hundreds of California schools about the impact of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) on instruction. The researchers also visited a smaller sample of schools to confirm and expand on the information obtained through the surveys. The researchers concluded that CAHSEE is having a “profound” impact on instruction (Wise et al., 2003).

The study identified several positive effects of the tests on curriculum and instruction:

■ High school instruction is covering a greater portion of the California Content Standards assessed by CAHSEE. In 1999, only about 20% of schools reported covering at least 75% of the standards assessed by CAHSEE; by 2003, more than 80% of the schools reported at least 75% coverage.
Over the past three years, many high schools and middle schools have initiated new courses and adopted new textbooks for existing courses in order to better align their instruction with state content standards.

Schools have added a number of new remedial or supplemental courses, including many aimed specifically at students who do not pass the CAHSEE on the first try or at English language learners and students with disabilities.

Principals and teachers interviewed for the study said that the CAHSEE was a major factor driving schools to make these changes.

Despite these trends, instruction throughout the state has not been effective for all students, especially in mathematics according to the report. In half the state’s high schools, less than 50% of the class of 2004 has passed the math portion of the CAHSEE. The HumRRO evaluators found, however, that high school pass rates on the CAHSEE are closely related to coverage of the tested standards in the high school curriculum. In English/language arts (ELA), 100% of the schools in the survey that had implemented high levels of content coverage early (just before the CAHSEE legislation was enacted in 1999) had pass rates greater than 75%, while only 61% of schools that had not yet implemented high levels of coverage at the time of the study had pass rates that high. In math, the percentage of schools with pass rates greater than 75% ranged from 100% for early implementers down to just 19% for schools that had not yet implemented high levels of coverage. (See Table 1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Year in Which Instruction Covered at Least 75% of Content Standards Tested</th>
<th>ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS</th>
<th>MATHEMATICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools Reaching 75% Coverage</td>
<td>Schools with &gt;75% Passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1999</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–2003</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Yet</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wise et al. (2003). Independent Evaluation of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE): AB 1609 Study Report, Table 4.3. Adapted and used with permission of authors.
A recent study by the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (NBETPP) also explored the impact of tests on curriculum and instruction in states that attached different levels of stakes to the test scores (Pedulla et al., 2003). The study surveyed a nationally representative sample of teachers from states with low-, moderate-, and high-stakes tests. A state was classified as low stakes when it attached no apparent rewards or sanctions to its test scores and as high stakes when it attached consequences such as student graduation or school accreditation to its scores. As might be expected, the study concluded that high-stakes tests had a greater influence than low-stakes tests, as follows:

- Forty percent of teachers in high-stakes states said their schools’ test results influenced their teaching on a daily basis, compared with just 10% of teachers in low-stakes states.

- Teachers in high-stakes states generally reported feeling more pressure than those in lower-stakes states. A large majority of teachers felt there is so much pressure for high scores on the state-mandated test that they have little time to teach anything not covered on the test. This view was most pronounced in high-stakes states.

- Teachers in high-stakes states were more likely than those in low-stakes states to say that the test brought much-needed attention to education issues, although only a minority of teachers agreed with this view.

In a second study conducted by NBETPP, Clarke and her associates (2003) interviewed 360 elementary, middle, and high school teachers as well as school- and district-level administrators in Kansas, Michigan, and Massachusetts. These three states were chosen because their tests held different levels of consequences for students—low stakes in Kansas (no official consequences), moderate stakes in Michigan (endorsed diploma and college tuition credit attached to 11th grade test scores), and high stakes in Massachusetts (students must pass the 10th grade state exam to earn a diploma). Not surprisingly, Massachusetts reported the strongest test-related effects—both positive and negative—on curriculum and instruction. Among the study’s findings were the following:

- To prepare for the state test, educators in all three states reported that they removed, emphasized, and added curriculum content to varying degrees, with removing content the most frequently reported activity. Massachusetts educators reported about twice as much activity in these areas as teachers in Kansas and Michigan. Perceived positive effects of these changes included the removal of unneeded content, a renewed emphasis on important content, and the addition of important topics not previously taught. Perceived negative effects included a narrowing of the curriculum, an overemphasis on certain topics at the expense of others, and an overcrowded curriculum.

- Massachusetts teachers reported about twice the number of changes to their instructional and assessment practices as their peers in Kansas and Michigan. Perceived positive effects of these changes included a renewed emphasis on writing, critical thinking skills, discussion, and explanation. Perceived negative effects included reduced instructional creativity, increased preparation for tests, a focus on breadth rather than depth of content coverage, and a curricular sequence and pace that were inappropriate for some students.
Impact on Students

New findings about the effects of exit exams on students have focused on four main areas: student attitudes and motivation, student achievement, dropout rates, and pass rates on the tests.

Student Attitudes and Motivation

There has been much speculation but little direct evidence about how exit exams affect students’ motivation to work hard in high school, their plans for graduation and beyond, and their general self-esteem. A few recent studies have surveyed either the students themselves or their teachers and administrators to determine the impact of exit exams on students’ attitudes.

In California, students complete a brief questionnaire at the end of the exit exam asking about their reactions to the test and their plans for high school and beyond. During the 2002 test administration (the most recent information available), an overwhelming majority of students reported that the test was very important or somewhat important to them and that they believed they would graduate from high school (Wise et al., 2002). More than half the students, however, indicated that the exit exam requirement would make it “a lot harder” or “somewhat harder” to graduate. Students who took the test twice viewed the test as more challenging than first-time test-takers did. Overall, about 50% of students reported that they planned to go to four-year colleges or universities, but students who took the test twice were less likely to report having such plans.

In the NBETPP interview study described above, educators in Kansas, Michigan, and Massachusetts were asked about their perceptions of the effects of the state test on their students (Clarke et al., 2003). In all three states, interviewees reported more negative than positive effects on students, including test-related stress, unfairness to special populations, and too much testing. Massachusetts interviewees were the most likely to note negative effects overall and were three times as likely as educators in the other states to mention adverse impacts of the test on special education students, particularly in relation to the 10th grade exit exam.

Student Achievement

Policymakers are looking to exit exams as a way to improve learning, so the ultimate research question is whether these exams are helping to raise student achievement. Several recent studies have explored whether high-stakes tests, including but not limited to high school exit exams, are associated with increased student achievement.

Researchers Amrein and Berliner from Arizona State University attracted attention and criticism in the winter of 2003 with a report suggesting that efforts in states to tie serious consequences to test scores were producing few “transferable” academic gains—in other words, gains that showed up on measures other than the state tests themselves (Amrein & Berliner, 2002a). Focusing on 16 states with exit exams, the researchers looked at whether scores on tests other than the exit exam increased after the exit exams were introduced. In this case, the other tests analyzed included the ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement (AP) tests and the National Assessment of Edu-
cational Progress (NAEP). The researchers also compared trends in scores for the 16 states to the national average achievement trends for the same indicators and time periods. If student performance appeared to decline relative to the national trend after the introduction of the exit exam, the authors concluded that the exit testing had produced a negative effect. Overall, they found “inadequate evidence” to support the proposition that high school graduation exams increase student achievement; that is, scores seemed to go up or down in a random pattern not related to the existence of an exit exam. As described below, a second part of this study used similar methodology to look at the impact of exit exams on dropout rates.

Several researchers have criticized the Amrein and Berliner study on various grounds. Some have taken issue with the evaluators’ research methods, questioning why they compared the states with exit exams to the national average (in other words, to all states) instead of using the more conventional research design of comparing states with exit exams to those without such tests. A few researchers have asserted that by applying the study’s underlying methodology more systematically and correctly, one could reach the opposite conclusion (Raymond & Hanushek, 2003). Raymond and Hanushek’s analysis found that NAEP scores actually improved at a faster rate in states with strong accountability systems; that is, they found increases in almost all of the states where Amrein and Berliner claimed to find decreases.

A major study by Stanford University researchers Carnoy and Loeb, to be released later this year, made the case that high-stakes tests have encouraged academic achievement. By reviewing NAEP data but using slightly different measures of school completion than Amrein and Berliner did, Carnoy and Loeb concluded that state accountability programs that include high-stakes testing are probably more helpful than harmful. Although they did not focus specifically on states with high school exit exams, these researchers rated all 50 states on the strength of their accountability systems. States were given the lowest rating of 1 if they tested students but did nothing with the results other than collect and report test data. States received a high rating of 5, on the other hand, if they used test results to reward or punish schools or withhold diplomas. Carnoy and Loeb found that the stronger a state’s accountability system, the greater the gain its students made on the NAEP 8th grade math test. Similarly, NAEP math score gains for 4th graders were also higher in states with high-stakes tests than in those without, although the gains were not as great as in 8th grade. In both grades, African American and Hispanic students in states with high-stakes tests tended to make greater improvements than white students. And the researchers found no substantial evidence that more students were repeating a grade or failing to graduate from high school as a result of high-stakes tests.

What can we conclude from this collection of recent findings about the impacts of high-stakes tests on student achievement? David Berliner expressed little surprise that different methods yield different results, adding that as more researchers become involved and more data is produced, “It wouldn’t surprise me if we find high-stakes testing has positive results in some states and negative results in others” (Viadero, 2003). Although the achievement effects of a policy like a testing program are difficult to isolate, other observers have concurred that the involvement of additional researchers is likely to improve the data and stimulate important debates about the most appropriate methods for studying these issues (Viadero, 2003).
Critics of exit exams often charge that these tests will encourage more students, particularly poor and minority students, to drop out of school. If true, this would be a major cause for concern. Already about 5% of all high school students drop out each year, and increasing numbers are getting a General Educational Development (GED) credential instead of earning a regular diploma (Rumberger, 2001). Failure to earn a diploma also brings social costs, because both dropouts and GED-holders are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed or have lower-paying jobs (National Research Council, 2001). Furthermore, the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires high schools to use graduation rates as part of the determination of whether high schools and school districts are making adequate yearly progress.

Research on the impact of exit exams on dropout rates is limited and inconclusive, so testing policies continue to be made in the absence of good information about their probable consequences. To help clarify what is (and is not) known in this area, the Center on Education Policy convened an expert panel in March 2003. Composed of researchers and practitioners with expertise in exit exam policies and dropout issues, this panel considered what conclusions could be drawn from existing research about the impact of these exams on dropout rates and what kinds of further studies are needed to clarify this issue. Much of the information in this section is drawn from the panel’s work and is focused on studies that have been released, expanded on, or publicized since the Center’s baseline report on exit exams was published in August 2002.

Researchers have used various approaches and data sources to explore the impact of exit exams on dropout rates. Some recent studies support the claim that exit exams are increasing dropout rates, while others have produced no evidence of a relationship between exit exams and dropouts. On balance, the panel concluded that these recent studies offer only a moderate degree of evidence suggesting that exit exams are associated with higher dropout rates. At the same time, the research to date offers no evidence that exit exams decrease dropout rates—in other words, exit exams are clearly not helping to keep students in school.

For reasons explained in Box 1, the relationship between exit exams and dropout rates is a complicated topic to study because definitions of dropouts and ways of counting them vary so widely and because it is difficult to isolate the effect of the exit exam policy from all the other inputs, reforms, and policies simultaneously occurring in the educational context that could affect dropout rates. Some researchers have tried to address these complexities by comparing dropout rates between states with and without exit exams, or between cohorts of students within a state before and after an exit exam was introduced. Researchers have also begun using sophisticated statistical techniques to try to isolate the effect of exit exams from other influences. The results of some of these studies support the claim that exit exams are increasing dropout rates.

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1 A fuller discussion of issues related to exit exams and dropout rates can be found in a paper available from the Center on Education Policy, “Effects of High School Exit Exams on Dropout Rates: Summary of a Panel Discussion.” This paper is available at www.cep-dc.org.

2 Panel members included Marguerite Clarke, Boston College and Spencer/Hewlitt Fellow; Sherman Dorn, University of Southern Florida; Phillip Kaufman, MPR Associates, Berkeley CA; Nettie Letgers, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University; Dean Lillard, Cornell University; and John Robert Warren, University of Minnesota.
Several factors make it difficult to study the relationship between exit exams and dropout rates and may account for some of the inconsistent findings across studies. One overarching problem that makes all of the data on dropouts confusing is the long-standing debate over the best way to count them. Dropouts are calculated in many different ways across national surveys, states, districts, and research studies. For instance, some types of calculations include students who attain a GED or other alternative credential as high school completers, while others do not. Some methods seek to determine how many students graduate “on time”—three years after they were enrolled in 9th grade—while others count the number of students who have not received a graduation certificate by a certain age. Still other methods look at the number of students in a given grade or age span who were enrolled and failed to complete the year’s requirements—an approach that may over-count dropouts if students who transfer to other jurisdictions or later complete school are counted.

In short, dropout rates can vary enormously depending on the methods used. The high school dropout rate in Texas for the 1998-99 school year would range from 2% to 37%, depending on the counting method used (Viadero, 2001). In Massachusetts, a debate is occurring about how to count dropouts and how the counting method influences efforts to gauge the impact of the state’s high school exit exam, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

Available national and state dropout data have other limitations (Kaufman, 2001). The Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau is the only source of national long-term trend data on dropout and completion rates, but concerns exist about whether it inflates the graduation rate by counting GED-holders as high school completers and by depending on respondents to describe their own levels of educational attainment. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) overseen by the U.S. Department of Education are extensive, but they are a decade old and were collected during a period when exit exams differed in key ways from those currently used in many states—a factor that must be taken into account by researchers who use NELS. A new national high school longitudinal study, the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, is not yet available but eventually may be helpful.
State dropout data are generally taken from school and district administrative records, which many analysts feel are not as accurate as one would like for research. Most districts calculate graduation statistics by trying to track individual students over time. Although this is the preferred approach for gathering data about students’ progression through school, few districts have the resources or incentive to do this successfully. Faced with ambiguous or missing information about the whereabouts of individuals, they often end up underreporting dropout rates. Data entry errors, such as entering the wrong student-identification codes, are also fairly common. Most districts simply lack the resources to establish the kinds of quality controls that would ensure an accurate data set. The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-279) provides a competitive grant program for states to develop statewide longitudinal data systems which may be used to track dropouts, but those systems will take many years to implement.

Another challenge faced by researchers is to isolate the role that exit exams play in the complex mix of home, school, and economic factors influencing a student’s decision to drop out. Researchers have used statistical techniques to control for factors other than the exit exam that are hypothesized to be associated with dropout rates; for instance, they might look at whether students who are quite similar in their prior achievement and socioeconomic status are more likely to drop out if they are required to pass an exit exam. Nevertheless, many potentially relevant factors are left out. For instance, an increase in the number of required courses is associated with higher dropout rates, yet that variable is not controlled for in most of the existing studies. This makes many of the findings difficult to interpret because state course requirements are often ratcheted up around the same time an exit exam is introduced. Although a study may find a correlation between dropouts and exit exams, it is nearly impossible to tease out the effect of the exam from the effect of more stringent course requirements.

Policies to retain students in grade should also be factored into dropout research, because many students who have been held back for low achievement end up quitting school before they ever reach the point of taking an exit exam. When some districts within a state have a strict grade retention policy, it becomes impossible to answer the question of whether exit exams are causing young people to drop out because studies generally have not accounted for differences across jurisdictions in the pools of students who have made it to the point of taking an exit exam.
One recent analysis of this type is the second part of the Amrein and Berliner study (2002b) mentioned above. Part of this study looked for changes in dropout rates, high school graduation rates, and enrollment in GED programs after an exit exam was introduced in 16 states. Enrollment in GED programs was measured in two ways: by examining whether the percentage of the state population enrolled in the GED program increased, and whether the average age of GED examinees decreased after implementation of an exit exam. For each of these outcomes, they compared each state's trend lines to the national ones to control for normal fluctuations and extraneous influences on the data. If changes in rates after the introduction of an exit exam matched the nation, they concluded that the effect was unclear. Otherwise changes were classified as increases or decreases as compared to the nation.

Using these methods, the researchers concluded that exit exams tend to be associated with negative consequences. The dropout rate increased in eight states and decreased in five after exit exams were implemented, while the graduation rates increased in five states and decreased in ten. The rate at which people took the GED exam increased in nine states and decreased in seven after implementation of an exit exam. And the average age of GED examinees increased in six states and decreased in ten. That is, in ten states with exit exams, GED examinees were getting younger as compared to the national average. The researchers concluded that high school exit exams led to higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and increased enrollments in GED programs in the majority of states.

Warren and Edwards (2003) examined data from NELS, a data set that tracked a nationally representative sample of students in the graduating class of 1992 as they progressed from 8th grade through high school. The researchers used a statistical technique that enabled them to isolate the impact of a high school exit exam requirement on five different student outcomes—receiving an on-time diploma, receiving a late diploma, earning a GED, working toward a GED, and attaining neither a diploma nor a GED—and to determine whether this impact was more or less pronounced for different types of students. The researchers found that students who were required to pass exit exams in the early 1990s had 70% higher odds of obtaining a GED instead of a regular diploma and 40% higher odds of working toward that credential, instead of earning a regular high school diploma. This effect was observed regardless of students’ race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or achievement level.

Other studies based on different methods or data sources have produced no evidence of a relationship between exit exams and dropouts. Carnoy and Loeb (forthcoming, 2003) used a different technique to see whether the existence of high-stakes tests, such as exit exams, in a state could predict how long students stayed in high school. They found no effect of high-stakes testing on the progression through high school for black or white students, although they could not rule out some effect for Hispanic students.

In Minnesota, Davenport and colleagues (2002) investigated graduation and dropout rates to see whether any changes occurred after the introduction of the state’s new exit exam, the Basic Skills Test. They did not find any overall negative impacts. The class of 2000 was the first for which diplomas were withheld because of the Basic Skills Test. The graduation rates for the four years prior to implemen-
tation of the exit exam were within 1% of the graduation rates in 2000, from 78% to 79%. The dropout rate for the same period was constant at 11% for each of the five years. Although the graduation and dropout rates did not change much overall the year after the Basic Skills Tests went into effect, this is not true across all students and schools. The graduation rates for English language learners fell in 2000. A drop also occurred for the Twin Cities suburbs, while charter schools continued their dramatic rise in the percentage of students graduating.

But interestingly, the investigators found that a large number of students—mostly low-income and minority students—graduated without having passed both tests, probably due to exemptions and other special provisions. Also intriguing is their observation that over half the students who dropped out had already passed both tests, indicating that for a substantial number of dropouts, passing the tests was not the main determining factor in their decision to leave school.

Massachusetts reported in July 2002 that a significant number of the students in the class of 2003 who failed the MCAS in spring 2001 and did not take the retest in winter 2001 had dropped out of high school. Of the 1,675 students who failed the math portion of the MCAS that spring, 572 students did not take the retest, and 168 of that group dropped out of high school. On the English portion of the test, 1,330 students did not pass the exam the first time and 379 did not take the retest. Of those 379 students, 207 dropped out. School officials could not say how much overlap there was in the data between the two portions of the exam. They expressed concern not only about the dropouts, but about the high number of students who remained in school but chose not to take the retest (Tench, 2002).

One month later, however, the Massachusetts Department of Education reported that the overall dropout rates did not spike up significantly for the class of 2003, as many observers had anticipated. The dropout rate for the 10th graders in the class of 2003—the first class required to pass the MCAS to graduate—was 3.5% in 2000-2001, compared to 3.7% during the previous school year. The stable dropout rates, along with a decline in the percentage of Hispanic students quitting school, countered speculation that the MCAS would cause a surge in dropouts. On the other hand, in 2000-2001, the ninth-grade drop-out rate rose by 0.2% hitting a five year high and raising concerns among MCAS opponents. Researchers warned that it is too soon to tell about the effects of the MCAS on dropout rates (Hayward, 2002).

A concern often raised in the debate about exit exams and dropout rates is that poor and minority students will be affected more negatively than other students because they have lower than average pass rates and are more likely to live in states with exit exams (Amrein & Berliner, 2002b; Center on Education Policy, 2002; Warren & Edwards, 2003). But there is no consistent evidence that exit exams are directly causing certain groups of students to drop out from school at increased rates.

Research has shown that other policies, such as retaining students in grade (Clarke, Haney & Madaus, 2000; Hauser, 2001; Rumberger, 2001) and instituting tougher course requirements (Bishop, Bishop, & Mane, 2002; Lillard & DeCicca, 2001; Lillard, forthcoming), are more strongly associated with dropping out or acquiring a GED than exit exams are. If exit exams impose substantive additional requirements on students, it is reasonable to expect that these exams will lead to similar outcomes, without extra support or resources to help students meet these requirements.
Research has shown that the decision to drop out is a complex process, shaped by many factors over a long period of time (Rumberger, 2001). While an exit exam alone probably does not cause many students to drop out, it may be a tipping factor for some students. For instance, a student who is already at risk of dropping out, after a long history of low achievement and perhaps retention in grade, could become discouraged by the prospect of taking an exit exam and may decide to quit. This is just a hypothesis, however, because research has yet to illuminate how exit exams play into students’ decisions to leave school.

Even if a statistical correlation or causal relationship is found between exit exams and dropout rates, important questions remain about how or why the exam influences students’ decisions to drop out or stay in school. Large-scale surveys are not the best means for uncovering these processes. Qualitative, descriptive, in-depth studies that use interviews and other open-ended research methods are generally the most useful, but this kind of research has been rare in dropout research. With the growing emphasis on testing, however, researchers are showing greater interest in studying these critical questions and may soon undertake more of these types of studies.

**Initial and Cumulative Pass Rates**

Initial pass rates from 2002-03 continue to show great variation among states and for different subjects. (The term “initial” pass rate refers to the percentage of students who pass the test on the first try, while the term “cumulative” pass rate refers to the percentage of students who eventually pass by the time they are ready to graduate, in some cases after multiple tries.) Table 2 below provides initial pass rate data from some of the states with exit exams. Several states only have initial pass rate data from years prior to 2002, while others report only cumulative pass rates. Data from these two types of states have been omitted from the table.

With a limited number of states reporting initial pass rates, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about trends. In several of these states, pass rates tend to range from about 65% to 85%. It is interesting to note, however, that the widest range among the states in initial pass rates—from 36% to 91%—is in mathematics, while writing and social studies have narrow ranges. Some of this variation may be a result of differences in test difficulty, but many alternate explanations also make sense. Washington has relatively low initial pass rates, but this may be because the test does not yet have consequences for students, so they are not taking the exam seriously. Critics in Nevada, where the initial pass rate is only 36% in mathematics, maintain that this is because the material on the test has not been covered in classrooms around the state. Georgia’s relatively high initial pass rates may be related to test content, familiarity with the test—the test has been a requirement since 1994, so students and teachers are more familiar with the exam than their counterparts in other states—or to a variety of other factors.

Initial pass rates in writing are generally higher in comparison to other subject areas. This may be a function of the fact that these tests often have a more subjective scoring system, rather than a clear right or wrong answer as multiple-choice items do, and some scorers may give students the benefit of the doubt. It could also be that students have more experience with writing than in specific subject areas.
In 2002, the Center reported that significant racial-ethnic achievement gaps were apparent in the initial pass rates for students on high school exit exams. In the states we reviewed last year, we identified gaps in the pass rates between white and Asian students on one hand and African American and Hispanic students on the other, although the extent of the gaps varied by group, subject, and state. The pass rates of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from low-income families were also well below those for the overall student population.

This year we reviewed more recent information from several states that released disaggregated data on initial pass rates. Again, we consistently found gaps in initial pass rates among different racial, ethnic, income, and other subgroups of students, as shown in Table 3. The extent of these gaps varies by state, subject, and subgroup.

In the 10 states shown in Table 3, the gaps in initial pass rates between white and African American students on reading/ELA exams range from a 5-point difference in Georgia to a 41-point difference in Florida. Between white and Hispanic students in reading/ELA, the disparities range from a 10-point difference in New Mexico to a 32-point difference in Minnesota. In math, the gaps between white and African American students range from a 17-point difference in Georgia to a 45-point difference in Minnesota; white-Hispanic gaps in math follow a similar pattern, although they are not as wide. Georgia’s relatively narrow gaps in achievement may be related to the facts that its exit exam has been required for several years and initial pass rates are high overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATES</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>MATH</th>
<th>SCIENCE</th>
<th>SOCIAL STUDIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska (2002)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida (2002)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>95%</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<td>94%</td>
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<td>Virginia (2002)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington (2002)</td>
<td>59%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
### TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PASSING AN EXIT EXAM ON THE FIRST TRY FOR ALL STUDENTS AND BY SUBGROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student subgroups</th>
<th>AK math 2002</th>
<th>AK reading</th>
<th>FL $^1$ math 2002</th>
<th>FL $^1$ reading</th>
<th>GA math 2002</th>
<th>GA ELA</th>
<th>IN math 2002</th>
<th>IN ELA</th>
<th>LA math 2002</th>
<th>LA reading</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<td>53%</td>
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<td>45%</td>
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<td>80%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>74%</td>
</tr>
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<td>56%</td>
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<td>87%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<td>47%</td>
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<td>48%</td>
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<td>Students with disabilities</td>
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<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>72%</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<td>79%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>43%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>52%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. Florida’s figures include a small proportion of retained 10th graders, which may affect pass rates. In addition, Florida’s figures are for ELLs with less than one year of services in English as a Second or Other Language.

2. Nevada’s figures for students with disabilities are only for students with Individualized Education Programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and do not include students with disabilities who are served under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
The trends across states for Asian students are less clear. In most of the states depicted in the table, initial pass rates for Asian students are close to or higher than those of white students, especially in math. But in Alaska and Minnesota, initial pass rates for Asian students are significantly lower than those for white students.

Pass rates continue to be well below average for English language learners and students with disabilities. Disparities also persist for low-income students (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunches).

These gaps are worrisome because if a failure to pass an exit exam on the first try does encourage students to drop out of school, then minority students and other subgroups with lower initial pass rates will be much more negatively affected by exit exams. They are also of concern in what they indicate about the continuing gap in academic achievement.

What matters most are the cumulative pass rates for students on exit exams, because they tell us more about who receives a diploma. Yet these data continue to be difficult to come by. However, the Center did obtain disaggregated cumulative pass rate data this year for Alabama and Massachusetts, shown in Table 4. Student tracking systems are still lacking, and information for a student cohort is not yet available in states with new exams. Furthermore, some states are still deciding how to define cumulative pass rates, grappling with such issues as whether and how to count dropouts and students who obtain GEDs and how to deal with other special cases. (See Box 2 for a discussion of the controversy in Massachusetts surrounding how pass rates are calculated.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT GROUPS</th>
<th>ALABAMA CLASS OF 2002</th>
<th>MASSACHUSETTS CLASS OF 2003 (REPORTED 5/9/03)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 These cumulative pass rates may have changed by the time this report is published. The cumulative pass rates displayed here may be lower than what is eventually reported.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
Massachusetts’ cumulative pass rate, or competency determination rate, is calculated in the following way: Take the 12th grade enrollment as of October 1 of a school year, minus any students who transfer out of the system during that school year. Divide the number of students who qualify for a competency determination, whether by passing the MCAS or through the state’s appeals process, by that number. The final competency determination rate counts students through September 1 of the following year. When the state reported cumulative pass rates to the Center on Education Policy as of May 9, 2003, this method yielded an overall cumulative pass rate of 91% for the state.

Several advocacy groups and researchers have expressed concern that this method of calculating pass rates has artificially inflated the percentage of students who have passed the MCAS. In particular, they say the state’s method fails to account for students who may have dropped out prior to 12th grade because of the exam and students who have been held back so they have extra time to prepare for the exam.

A group of researchers at Boston College, including Anne Wheelock, George Madaus, and Walt Haney, has proposed using 9th grade enrollment as the basis for calculating MCAS pass rates. By using this number, they calculate that the real pass rate drops to 70% (Wheelock, 2003). When one looks at specific subgroups of students, the difference between the state’s method and this method is even larger. For example, the MCAS pass rate for students with disabilities, as calculated by the state, was 72%, while the Boston College researchers calculated the figure to be 42% (Haney, Madaus, & Wheelock, 2003).

This methodology has shortcomings as well, in that it points to broader educational problems that are not directly related to the MCAS. Students who cannot be accounted for between 9th and 12th grade are counted as not passing the MCAS. While this inability to account for these students is a shortcoming of student data systems, it may not indicate a failure to motivate or educate these students. Also, while the MCAS likely leads some students to drop out of school, many of the students who are counted as not passing the MCAS using 9th grade enrollment figures may have dropped out regardless of the MCAS.

Both methods point to the need for clearer explanations from states about how they calculate and report pass rates and for more nuanced ways to make these determinations.
In 2001, the California state legislature mandated an independent study of the California High School Exit Exam. Known as the Assembly Bill 1609 Study, this analysis was conducted by Lauress L. Wise and his colleagues at the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO). The study report was published on May 1, 2003. Although a purpose of the study was to help the state board of education make decisions about whether to delay the CASHEE requirement, the study team was not charged with making a recommendation on this question to the board. Instead, the charge was to report on the test development process and the implementation of standards-based instruction in the state.

The study’s findings about the benefits and potential drawbacks of the exam were mixed, but the study did call attention to many encouraging changes that have come about because of the test. Examples include the following:

- The development of the CAHSEE meets all of the professional standards for use as a graduation requirement. Instruction in some schools was not closely aligned to the California Content Standards at the time the class of 2004 was in grades 7 through 9, but remedial programs have been created in nearly all high schools to provide additional opportunities for students to learn the required material.

- The CAHSEE requirement has been a major factor leading to dramatically increased coverage of the California Content Standards at both the high school and middle school levels and to the development or improvement of courses providing help for students who have difficulty mastering these standards.

- Available evidence indicates that many courses of initial instruction and remediation have been of limited effectiveness in helping students master the required standards. In particular, mathematics instruction has been less effective than in language arts. High school pass rates are closely related to the reported coverage of the CAHSEE standards in the high school curriculum.

- A lack of prerequisite skills seems to be preventing many students from receiving benefits from instruction in relevant content standards. In other words, earlier preparation has been inadequate. In addition, low student motivation and lack of strong parental support may contribute to the limited effectiveness of these courses.

- Many factors suggest that the effectiveness of standards-based instruction will improve for each succeeding class after the class of 2004, although it is not clear how soon pass rates on the exam will improve. In particular, coverage of content standards has increased over the years, and schools have adopted new textbooks that are better aligned with state standards.

The study also outlines possible actions for the board to take, depending on whether it decides to continue the CAHSEE requirement or delay it. If the state continues the requirement, the study suggests several options, including: (1) increasing the pass rate by lowering the cut score, reducing the content covered by the CAHSEE, or allowing high scores in one section of the test to compensate for poor scores in another; (2) providing additional ways of demonstrating mastery of the standards, such as waiver programs with criteria that students must meet or alternate assessments such as portfolios; and (3) recognizing the achievement of students who don’t pass the exam through such means as certificates of achievement.

If the state defers the CAHSEE requirement, the study’s authors have expressed concern that this could slow the momentum for improved instruction in the content standards and dampen student motivation to learn the material in the standards. The researchers make several suggestions to minimize these problems including: (1) offering a diploma seal, certificate, or indication on the transcript for students who have passed the test; (2) allowing or encouraging districts to require students to pass the CAHSEE as part of their local graduation requirements; and (3) continuing to use CAHSEE for school accountability purposes and to meet the requirements of NCLB.
Both states report cumulative pass rates of approximately 90%, but significant gaps remain among student subgroups after several retest opportunities. Compared with initial pass rates, these gaps appear to be narrowing by the time students approach graduation. In Massachusetts, overall initial 10th grade pass rates in math and reading for the class of 2003 were approximately 40% higher than for English language learners and students with disabilities, while cumulative pass rates by the end of 12th grade were just over 20% higher for students as a whole as compared to ELLs and students with disabilities.

We do not know why these disparities in pass rates shrink over time. It may be that dropout rates are higher among the subgroups that lagged in initial pass rates, intervention programs to help students pass are working, or the number of retest opportunities makes it possible for most students to eventually pass the exams.

Impact of Research on State Policies

Research findings about the effects of exit exams are beginning to influence state policies. As a case in point, the California state legislature mandated the aforementioned HumRRO study of the California High School Exit Exam to inform its future policy decisions about the exam program. State leaders have already used findings from this study, which are outlined in Box 3, to help make a decision about whether to delay withholding of diplomas based on the CAHSEE.

In summary, attention to the consequences of exit exams has been escalating in both the research and policy arenas. Rather than being discouraged by the limitations of the research to date, people should view the existing work as part of a natural scientific progression. Rarely does a single study in education produce unequivocal and durable results—multiple methods, applied over time, are usually required to answer a scientific question (Shavelson & Towne, 2001). As researchers build and improve on past studies, ask better and more refined questions, and collect more accurate and complete data, it is likely that we will gradually converge on a clearer set of answers to vital questions about the effects of exit exams or at least have better informed debates about their effects. And as policymakers see more first-hand evidence of the effects of these exams on real students, they will know better whether these policies are achieving the desired goals and will be able to refine or amend the policies accordingly.
What Are the Main Features of State Exit Exams?

HIGHLIGHTS

- States are continuing to move toward exit exams that they characterize as more rigorous and better aligned with state content standards. Between 2002 and 2003, the number of states reporting that they had minimum competency exams dropped from 9 to 6, while the number with standards-based or end-of-course exams rose from 10 to 14. By 2008, only 3 states plan to use minimum competency exit exams, while 21 intend to use standards-based or end-of-course tests.

- All states with exit exams assess English/language arts (ELA) and math, but more are also beginning to test other subjects. In 2003, 9 states tested science or social studies or both subjects, compared with 7 states in 2002.

- Most states with exit exams allow students to use calculators to solve at least some questions on the math portion of the test. The majority of states do not limit the amount of time students have to complete an exit exam, and those that do set generous time limits.

- The majority of states with exit exams publicly release some or all of the test questions and answers from past tests.

- Most states report exit exam results to students, parents, schools, and districts within one or two months of testing. States vary considerably, however, in their timetables for releasing test scores to the public, with several states publicly reporting scores only once a year. All states report giving students feedback on whether they passed or failed the exam, as well as their scores in broad subject areas and their subscores for skill or content areas within a subject.
In the 2002 publication, State Exit Exams: A Baseline Report, the Center on Education Policy described the main features of the current generation of state exit examinations. We reported on the types of exams given, the grade levels in which they were first administered, the subjects tested, and the types of test questions used. In 2003, we collected updated information about these basic features through a state survey. We also surveyed states about four other pertinent characteristics of exit exams: (1) the use of calculators, (2) time limits on the tests, (3) policies for releasing test questions and answers, and (4) policies for reporting scores and providing feedback to students and others.

This chapter describes the basic features of state exit exam systems, highlighting changes that have occurred between 2002 and 2003. The chapter also reports new information about the four additional characteristics mentioned above. More detailed information about all of these features can be found in the State Profiles section at the end of this report and in our 2002 baseline report.

Basic Features of Exit Exams in 2003

In 2003, 19 states had mandatory exit exams in place—one more than in 2002, as a result of Massachusetts attaching a graduation requirement to its MCAS exam. Five more states plan to phase in mandatory exit exams by 2008. At least one other state (Idaho) is considering adopting an exit exam. The Idaho State Assessment and Accountability Commission has proposed a series of exams, but no final action has been taken (Roberts, 2003).

The trends in exit exams noted in our baseline report continued in 2003. These include shifts toward harder exams, testing of additional subjects, and more varied types of questions.

In fact, 2003 has seen considerable activity related to exit exams. In Massachusetts, the standards-based MCAS took effect as a graduation requirement for the class of 2003. Six states (Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, and New York) began withholding diplomas in 2003 based on new or substantially revised exams or additional subject area tests. In several cases, the newer tests are standards-based or end-of-course exams intended to be more challenging than the minimum competency exams being replaced. High school seniors in Florida and Nevada, for example, had to pass new standards-based exams in 2003 to receive a diploma, instead of the states’ old minimum competency exams. Seniors in Mississippi had to pass new end-of-course exams to graduate rather than the previous minimum competency exam. In New York, the class of 2003 was the first required to pass all five Regents Comprehensive Exams to receive a diploma. The Regents Comprehensive Exams are end-of-course tests that the state has been phasing in for several years to replace its older minimum competency exam. Louisiana and New Jersey had already been using standard-based exit exams, but over the past few years they have phased in new standards-based exams.

Table 5 summarizes the main features of state exit exams as of 2003.
Types of Tests

In last year’s report, the Center grouped state exit exams into three categories, based on states’ own descriptions of their tests:

1. **MINIMUM COMPETENCY EXAMS** (MCEs), which generally focus on basic skills below the high school level;

2. **STANDARDS-BASED EXAMS** (SBEs), which are aligned with state standards and are generally targeted at the high school level; and

3. **END-OF-COURSE EXAMS** (EOCs), which are tied to the content of specific courses at the high school level.

Last year, the Center noted a shift underway from the reputedly easier minimum competency exams to the more difficult standards-based and end-of-course exams—a trend that has continued in 2003. Between 2002 and 2003, the number of states with minimum competency exit exams dropped from 9 to 6, while the number with more challenging standards-based or end-of-course exit exams rose from 10 to 14. By 2008, only 3 states plan to use minimum competency exit exams, while 21 intend to use standards-based or end-of-course tests.

Figure 2 shows the types of exit exams states are using or plan to use within the next five years.

We surveyed states about the grade levels of the standards to which their exit exams are aligned. States reported a variety of grade-level alignments. Some states said they aligned their tests to a range of grades, such as grades 9 through 12, while others reported aligning their tests to a specific grade, such as grade 11. Still others reported that the grade level varies depending on the subject being tested; this is especially the case with end-of-course exam systems. Although the Center did not conduct any alignment studies to determine how closely the exams are actually aligned with state content standards at the targeted grades, the grade-level alignment that a state reports is still a useful indicator of state expectations about the difficulty and purpose of its exit exam. At one end of the spectrum, California reported aligning its math test to standards for grades 6 through 8, and Utah reported aligning its exam sections to standards for grades 6 through 9. At the other end, Alabama said that its exit exam sections are aligned to grade 11 standards, and Louisiana said its system is aligned to standards for grades 9 through 12. Only three states—Minnesota, New Mexico and South Carolina—reported that their exams are not aligned to particular grade-level standards. These three states have minimum competency exams.

Subjects Tested

Every state with an exit exam in place continues to test in English/language arts and mathematics. The trend toward testing additional subjects, observed by the Center last year, continued during 2003. As shown in Figure 3, science and social studies are the most common additional subjects to test: 9 states tested one or both of these subjects in 2003, compared with 7 states in 2002. In 2003, Mississippi and Louisiana seniors for the first time had to pass science and social studies tests to graduate, and Massachusetts announced plans to add science and social studies tests to its exit exam system in the future.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Current Exam</th>
<th>Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class</th>
<th>Subjects Tested</th>
<th>Grade Level Tested</th>
<th>Type of Test</th>
<th>Grade Level of Alignment</th>
<th>Prior High School Exit Exam Being Phased Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Minimum Competency</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Math (including Algebra), ELA</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>ELA (9th and 10th) Math (6-8)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Math, reading</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>High School Competency Test (HSCT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Georgia High School Qualification Test (GHSQRT)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Math, ELA, writing, science, social studies</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Basic Skills Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Math, ELA</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>End of 9th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Graduation Examination for the 21st Century (GEE 21)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Math, ELA, science, social studies</td>
<td>ELA and math in 10; social studies and science in 11</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>Graduation Exit Exam (GEE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Algebra/Data Analysis, English I, Biology, Government</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>End-of-course</td>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>Maryland Functional Tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Math, ELA</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Basic Skills Test (BST)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum Competency</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Current Exam</td>
<td>Consequences Begin/Began for Graduating Class</td>
<td>Subjects Tested</td>
<td>Grade Level Tested</td>
<td>Type of Test</td>
<td>Grade Level of School Exit Exam Being End-of-course</td>
<td>Prior High School Exit Exam Being Phased Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Algebra I, English II (with writing component), Biology, U.S. History from 1877</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>End-of-course</td>
<td>Subject content alignment</td>
<td>Functional Literacy Examination (FLE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing prompts, (Science–field tested only)</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>8th-12th</td>
<td>Minimum Competency Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSC)</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Math, reading, language arts, science, social studies, composition</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Minimum Competency</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>North Carolina High School Competency Test (NCHSCT)</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Math, reading comprehension, computer skills</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Ohio Graduation Test (OGT)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Math, reading (2003,2004); writing, social studies, science (2005)</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>9th Grade Proficiency Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP)</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Minimum Competency</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Gateway Examinations</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Math, language, science</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Tennessee Competency Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Math, ELA, science, social studies</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>High school subjects</td>
<td>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Math, reading, writing</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Minimum Competency</td>
<td>6th-9th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Standards of Learning End of Course Exams (SOL)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Math, English: Writing, English: Reading Literature and Research, science, history/social studies</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>End-of-course</td>
<td>Content aligned</td>
<td>Literacy Passport Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Math, ELA</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Standards-based</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
FIGURE 2: TYPES OF EXIT EXAMS STATES ARE USING AND PLAN TO USE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MCE – minimum competency exam</th>
<th>SBE – standards-based exam</th>
<th>EOC – end-of-course exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>focused on basic skills below the high school level</td>
<td>aligned with state standards and targeted at the high school level</td>
<td>tied to a specific course at the high school level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2002 (out of 18 states)
- **MCE**: FL, MD, MN, MS, NV, OH, SC, TN, VA (9)
- **SBE**: AL, GA, IN, LA, NJ, NM, NC, TX (8)
- **EOC**: NY, TX (2)

Total for 2002 adds up to 19 because Texas gives students the option to pass either an SBE or an EOC.

In 2003 (out of 19 states)
- **MCE**: MD, MN, OH, SC, TN, VA (6)
- **SBE**: AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, NV, NJ, NM, NC, TX (11)
- **EOC**: MS, NY, TX (3)

Note: Total for 2003 adds up to 20 because Texas gives students the option to pass either an SBE or an EOC.

By 2008 (out of 24 states)
- **MCE**: AK, MN, UT (3)
- **SBE**: AL, AZ, CA, FL, IN, LA, MA, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, WA (16)
- **EOC**: GA, MD, MS, NY, VA (5)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
Just one other subject was mentioned and that was only in one state. North Carolina reported that starting with the class of 2001, it began giving a computer skills test as part of its exit exam system.

**Type of Test Questions**

Multiple-choice items continued to be the predominant type of test question on state exit exams, but only Alabama relied solely on multiple-choice questions. (See Figure 4.) Writing prompts—test items that call on students to write an essay, letter, or other written product—also appeared on most state exit exams in 2003. The trend we observed last year toward greater variety in test items has continued in 2003. Four more states (Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) began using short answer questions this year, and one (Louisiana) began using extended response items. Box 4 illustrates a range of item types that states are using to assess student knowledge in science.

**Retest Opportunities**

The number of times students can retake the test after failing it the first time ranges from 2 to 11 times, with 4 to 6 times the most common range. This variation among states is partly a result of practical considerations, such as when students are first tested. Minnesota, which first tests students in 8th grade, provides 11 retesting opportunities, while New Jersey, which initially tests students in 11th grade, pro-
vides only 2 chances to retake its exam. Washington currently provides no retest opportunities for students. However, consequences have not been phased in for students in this state, and retest and other support policies are currently being reviewed for students. It is unclear what the effects of more retesting opportunities are on cumulative pass rates; to answer this question, changes in pass rates over time would have to be analyzed.

Even if there are benefits from additional retest opportunities, a more frequent testing schedule can create administrative problems. In California, the CAHSEE is given every two months to accommodate the different academic calendars used throughout the state (some districts have year-round schooling while others use a traditional calendar). The state requires districts to allow a four-month break between test administrations, which would give students exactly three chances per year to take the test. In actuality, many schools are testing students every two months, even though it takes 10 weeks to receive test results. This means that many students are taking a retest before they even know whether they passed the last time they took the exam—a waste of testing time and resources (Gao, 2002).

**Other Characteristics of Exit Exams**

In 2003, the Center on Education Policy collected information from states for the first time about four additional characteristics of their exit exams: calculator use, time limits, release of items and answers, and score reporting and feedback. Several states are in the process of phasing out old examinations and phasing in new ones.

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**STATE HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS**

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**FIGURE 4: TYPES OF TEST QUESTIONS ON STATE EXIT EXAMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type of Test Question</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 2002</td>
<td>Multiple-choice – AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short Answer – IN, MS, NJ, NM, NY, VA (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Prompt – FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Extended Response – NM, NY (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 2003</td>
<td>Multiple-choice – AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short Answer – FL, IN, LA, MA, MS, NJ, NM, NY, NC, VA (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Prompt – GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Extended Response – LA, NM, NY (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 2008</td>
<td>Multiple-choice – AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short Answer – AK, AZ, FL, IN, LA, MD, MA, MS, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TX, WA (16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Prompt – AK, AZ, CA, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Extended Response – AZ, LA, MD, NM, NY, SC, WA (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
BOX 4: **A RANGE OF SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM STATE EXIT EXAMS IN SCIENCE**

**Sample Multiple-choice Question**
(released item from Tennessee’s Gateway Examinations)

In a biology class, students were asked to use a microscope to distinguish between plant and animal cells. A student noticed a difference between the vacuoles in plant and animal cells. How do the vacuoles in plant cells differ from animal cell vacuoles?

A. Plant cell vacuoles are usually larger.
B. Plant cell vacuoles are usually smaller.
C. Plant cells rarely contain vacuoles.
D. Plant cells usually contain more vacuoles.

**Sample Short Answer Question**
(released item from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Science Exam)

A sample of an element has a volume of 78.0 mL and a density of 1.85 g/mL. What is the mass in grams of the sample? Record and bubble in your answer to the nearest tenth on the answer document.

**Sample Extended Response Question**
(released items from New York’s Regents High School Examination in Biology)

Base your answers to the following questions on the information and data table below and on your knowledge of biology.

Reaction time is a measure of how quickly an individual responds to a stimulus. An activity was performed to determine the reaction time of a student. To do this, one student suspended the zero end of a meterstick between the thumb and index finger of another student. The meterstick was dropped, and both the distance the meterstick dropped and the time it took for the student being tested to catch the meterstick were recorded. This procedure was repeated four more times. The results are shown in the data table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trial</th>
<th>Distance (cm)</th>
<th>Time (sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the information in the data table, construct a line graph on the grid provided on your answer paper, following the directions below.

- Mark an appropriate scale on each labeled axis.
- Plot the data for distance on the graph. Surround each point with a small circle and connect the points.

Using one or more complete sentences, state the relationship between the number of trials and the reaction time.

*Source: Compiled by Center on Education Policy from state departments of education websites, June 2003.*
(Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia). In this section, we include in the analysis information on the new tests they are phasing in, which are also the testing systems examined in the State Profiles. We have also chosen to provide data for the five additional states that plan to have their first test with consequences in place by 2008.

**Calculator Use**

Most states permit all test-takers to use calculators on some or all of the mathematics section of their exit exams, as shown in Figure 5. This approach mirrors the widespread use of calculators in high school mathematics classrooms and is consistent with the policy of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which encourages the use of calculators in instruction and assessment:

> Research and experience support the potential for appropriate calculator use to enhance the learning and teaching of mathematics...Appropriate instruction that includes calculators can extend students’ understanding of mathematics and will allow students access to rich problem-solving experiences...Assessment and evaluation must be aligned with classroom uses of calculators (NCTM, n.d.).

Some states, such as Louisiana, allow students to use calculators on most parts of the math exam but require them to complete selected sections without calculators, to assess whether they have the computational skills to work out problems by hand. In Minnesota, students can use calculators on all sections of the test except those intended to measure estimation or mental math.

In Alaska, California, and Nevada, the only students permitted to use calculators on the exit exam are students with disabilities whose prescribed accommodations specifically allow calculator use. Arizona is the only state that prohibits any students from using calculators on its exam.

**Time Limits**

Most exit exams are not designed to be what we typically think of as timed tests—in other words, the intention is to allow ample time for students to demonstrate what they know and can do, not how fast they can do it. As shown in Figure 6, our survey found that the majority of states put no limits on the amount of time students have to complete their exit exams. Some states do set time limits for their tests for practical purposes, such as the need to facilitate scheduling on test days, and allow extended testing time only as an accommodation for students with disabilities. When states set time limits, they are usually generous, offering more than enough time for most students to complete the test. Typically, states direct schools to set their testing sessions for a certain amount of time and to make provisions on an individual basis for students who need more time.
States allowing all students to use calculators for at least some test items: AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (19)

States allowing calculator use only as an accommodation for students with disabilities: AK, CA, NV, SC (4)

States prohibiting calculator use: AZ (1)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.

States with time limits: CA, FL, GA, IN, MA, MD, NJ, NY, NC, OH (10)

States with no time limits: AL, AK, AZ, LA, MN, MS, NV, NM, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (14)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
Release of Questions and Answers

We asked states whether they release test questions and answers every year from their state high school exit exams, once the test is given. The majority of states do release some or all of their exam questions and responses, as shown in Figure 7. Releasing past test items to students, teachers, schools, and the public can be a valuable strategy to prepare for future exams. Teachers and students can learn from real test questions that have been used in the past and get a sense of how a test is structured and how difficult it is. The public can develop a better awareness of what is expected of students and can judge, at least on face value, the fairness of these tests. When states release items from past tests, however, they cannot use those questions again, so they must spend more time and money developing new items for future tests. Over the years, it can become a costly and time-consuming enterprise to continually create new items that meet professional test standards of fairness, validity, and other important attributes.

Score Reporting and Feedback

We asked states how long it took them, after students are tested, to provide test results to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public. States reported that districts, schools, students, and parents generally received scores at about the same
BOX 5: SAMPLE STUDENT SCORE REPORT: NEW JERSEY

Along with identifying information such as name, identification number, date of birth, grade, and ELL status, the Individual Student Report for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment provides students with detailed information about their achievement on the state’s exit exam. The following is an example of the level of detail a student would receive about his or her performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Your Scale Score</th>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Partially Proficient/Not Pass: Score BELOW 200</th>
<th>Proficient/Pass: Score AT OR ABOVE 200 but BELOW 250</th>
<th>Advanced Proficient/Pass: Score AT OR ABOVE 250</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts Literacy</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>PROFICIENT/NOT PASS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>PROFICIENT/PASS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY**

The Language Arts Literacy section assesses a student’s abilities in the following clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Your Raw Score</th>
<th>Just Proficient Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6.5 out of 18</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>16.0 out of 36</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting Text</td>
<td>6.0 out of 9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing/Critiquing Test</td>
<td>10.0 out of 27</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MATHEMATICS**

The Mathematics section assesses a student’s abilities in the following clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Your Raw Score</th>
<th>Just Proficient Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number Sense, Concepts &amp; Applications</td>
<td>5.0 out of 11</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial Sense &amp; Geometry</td>
<td>7.0 out of 12</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis, Probability, Statistics &amp; Discrete Mathematics</td>
<td>6.0 out of 12</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns, Functions &amp; Algebra</td>
<td>5.5 out of 12</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>23.5 out of 47</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
<td>17.5 out of 39</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

time, but the time frame for reporting results to these groups ranged from “immedi-
ately after the test” in New York to four months in Massachusetts. Most states said
they released results to these groups within one or two months after testing. Occa-
sionally, states provide results to districts before giving them to students and par-
ents, so the districts have time to check the results before releasing them. In North
Carolina, for example, school districts receive scores immediately after the tests,
while schools, students, and parents receive them within about 30 days.

States reported greater variation in their timetables for reporting test scores to
the public. Sometimes, exit exam scores are reported publicly at roughly the same
time they are provided to districts, schools, students, and parents. But in several
states—including Alabama, Arizona, California, Mississippi, and Tennessee—scores
are publicly reported just once a year. Although an annual reporting schedule may
have its drawbacks in terms of public awareness, it is easier and less costly for state
departments of education than more frequent reporting would be. In addition to
the costs of generating score reports, states must also cover the costs of public rela-
tions activities. Often, the public release of exit exam scores is accompanied by a
burst of activity from opponents of high-stakes testing and stepped-up media cov-
erage, especially when the average scores are lower than desired.

We also asked states about the kinds of written feedback they provide to stu-
dents about their performance on high school exit exams. This is critical, because
detailed feedback can help students to understand their strengths and weaknesses
and study more effectively for retesting. In particular, we asked whether states pro-
vided students with any or all of the following kinds of feedback: their passing or
failing status, their subject area scores, their subscores for specific skills or content
areas within each major subject tested, and their performance on individual test
items. All states reported giving students feedback on whether they passed or failed
and also informing them about their subject area scores and subscores. But only
three states—New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia—give students feedback about the
performance on individual test items. In addition to the information contained in
these reports, their readability is very important. If parents, students, and educators
cannot easily interpret these reports, the level of detail is less important.

Box 5 illustrates the kinds of details that New Jersey students receive about their
performance on the state’s exit exam. New Jersey is in the middle range of the states
we surveyed in terms of how much feedback it provides about test results.
How Much Does It Cost to Implement Exit Exams?

HIGHLIGHTS

- A realistic estimate of the costs of implementing an exit exam policy must take into account not only the direct costs of testing and of remediation for students who fail or are at risk of failing the exams, but also the “hidden” costs of professional development for teachers and preventive services at all grade levels to raise achievement and give students a substantial chance of passing the exams.

- The current costs of implementing exit exams are substantial, and the costs of raising test scores to meet state performance targets will be even greater. A study commissioned for this report estimated that in Indiana it costs $442 million annually, or $444 per pupil per year, to achieve the current level of performance on exit exams—which equals about 5.5% of the $8.1 billion Indiana spent on K-12 education in 2001-02. To raise achievement on the Indiana exam to the state standard of “commendable” performance would cost an extra $682 million annually, or $685 per pupil per year, on top of the current costs—equivalent to an additional 8.5% of Indiana’s yearly K-12 expenditures.

- As an exit exam program matures, the types of costs associated with the exams appear to change, as school districts spend less on test administration, preparation, and remediation and more on prevention and professional development. As average test scores keep improving, it will take more intensive and specialized services, with higher per pupil costs, to raise the pass rate, because the students who have not yet passed will increasingly consist of those with the greatest learning difficulties.

- In Indiana, dedicated state funding for exit exams and remediation covers only about 3% of the current estimated costs of carrying out the state mandate for exit exams. School districts are footing the bill for most of the current costs by
reallocating existing funds toward programs focused on test performance of low-achieving students and away from subjects not tested or students with less urgent needs. But raising performance to much higher levels will require substantial new funding to improve instruction for students in all grades—more than school districts can cover just by moving around existing funds.

A New Cost Study

How much does it cost to implement a policy of mandatory exit exams? This critical question is not easy to answer because today’s exit exams are relatively new, and their costs have not been widely studied. Although states may know how much it costs to develop, administer, and score a particular test, these direct testing costs are just the tip of the iceberg. The true costs of implementing exit exams also include remediation for students who fail exit exams or earlier state tests and other, less obvious or “hidden” expenses, such as professional development for teachers who must prepare students to pass the exams and programs to prevent poor performance at all grade levels. These broader costs are difficult to gauge and may not become apparent until the exit exam program is well underway. So when it comes to costs, states have forged ahead with exit exams largely on faith that whatever it costs, school districts will find the resources.

To learn more about the costs of high school exit exams, the Center on Education Policy contracted with Augenblick & Myers (A&M), a Denver-based consulting firm that had already done research on exit exams and school finance. With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Center asked A&M to develop a method for estimating the state and local costs of implementing mandatory state high school exit exams and to test that method in one state. Indiana was chosen as the test state because it has a well-developed exit exam, called the Graduation Qualifying Exam or GQE, that is typical in its main features and includes efforts to provide remediation and prevent failure. Although Indiana was the focus of this study, the A&M research team sought to design a method for estimating costs that could be applied to other states that have exit exams or are thinking about adopting them.

At the Center’s request, this commissioned study looked at both the costs of the exams at the current level of student performance and the costs of raising student performance to the higher targets embodied in state standards. The study’s findings were reported to the Center in a contractor report in February 2003 (Rose & Myers, 2003) and form the basis of this chapter.

Research Methods

The A&M study team consisted of Douglas Rose of Rosepol, Inc., and John Myers of JL Myers Group. Keith Gayler, the Center’s associate director, also participated in several site visits, panel meetings, and interviews conducted for the study. The team conducted most of the research for the study during the fall and winter of 2002-03.

Since most of the local costs associated with exit exams are not broken out or reported specifically as exam-related expenses, the study relied primarily on the profes-
sional judgment of expert panels to generate cost data. Supplementary information came from interviews with people knowledgeable about such issues as legal costs, curriculum, assessment, parent concerns, and public information. In addition, the researchers analyzed state documents relating to budgets, costs, and prices; standards, tests, and remediation policies; and general information about Indiana’s education system.

**Work of the Expert Panels**

The expert panels were the heart of the research process. The study team assembled panels of qualified service providers from different regions of Indiana, including district superintendents, district business managers, principals, teachers, testing specialists, special education providers, and alternative education experts. These panels were asked to consider a hypothetical Indiana district that reflected the size district attended by the median Indiana student and was average in demographics and performance on the GQE. One set of panels was asked to determine what types of programs and resources this hypothetical district would need to reach the current average level of GQE performance. A second set of panels was asked to determine the programs and resources needed to raise GQE pass rates to state standards of competent performance.

Once the local panels had identified the types and amounts of programs and resources needed under these two scenarios, the study team convened a state-level panel of school finance and budget specialists, state legislative staff in education and finance, experts in state programs and policies, and specialists in remediation and assessment. The state panel reviewed the work of the local panels and helped translate local findings into specific cost estimates. The estimates that came out of this process appear to be reliable within a range of 5 to 10%, according to the study’s authors.

**Types of Costs Considered**

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, states must administer at least one state test in grades 10 through 12, although this test does not have to be an exit exam required for graduation. Since states will be giving a high school test anyway, the A&M study sought to discern the *added* costs of having an exit exam—in other words, expenses beyond the ordinary costs of a state assessment program that includes a low-stakes high school test. This approach excludes certain routine costs of test development and administration but includes the costs of programs and activities needed to give students a substantial chance of passing the exit exam. Costs were excluded, however, if their link to the GQE was indirect or unknown, such as the costs of revamping teacher education programs to better prepare teacher candidates to teach in a test-based environment or the state costs of litigation related to exit exams.

The study identified four main types of costs associated with exit exams. They are:

1. **DIRECT TESTING COSTS.** These include expenses to develop and disseminate information about exit exams, develop and administer aspects of the exams related to their mandatory nature (such as setting cut scores), keep records, create alternative exams, provide accommodations for students with disabilities, train people to give tests, and arrange for retests.
2. **Remediation Costs.** Examples include the costs of summer school courses, after-school programs, special classes, or tutoring for students who failed a state-mandated exam at any grade. Also relevant are the costs of developing a remedial curriculum, adopting remedial software, and designing alternative routes for students to demonstrate skills.

3. **Professional Development Costs.** Examples include professional development that helps teachers to teach in a standards- and test-based environment, to provide better instruction to students with learning challenges, to address specific student weaknesses, or to use score reports to diagnose student needs and revise instruction.

4. **Prevention Costs.** These include expenses for activities to prevent school failure, such as revamping instruction to ensure students at all grades learn the knowledge and skills needed to pass state tests, instituting early programs to improve reading and math achievement, keeping track of individual students’ skills and test diagnoses, and developing techniques to present standards-based material to special education students or English language learners.

**Estimated Costs of Current Performance Levels**

The A&M study charged one set of local panels with estimating the resources required for a hypothetical Indiana school district to reach the current average level of performance on the GQE. In 2002, the most recent year for which data were available when the study was conducted, 68% of Indiana students passed either the mathematics or language arts section of the exam on the first try, and 60% passed both sections on the first try. Average pass rates were lower for African American and Hispanic students, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

The study estimated the current yearly costs of the exit exam in Indiana to be roughly $442 million, or about 5.5% of the $8.1 billion spent for K-12 education in Indiana in school year 2001-02. This is the equivalent of spending $444 per pupil per year for all students in grades K-12.

As shown in Table 6, the overwhelming majority of these costs ($442 per pupil) are borne at the local level. Only about $2 per pupil is spent at the state level, for such activities as test development and administration. However, the local share of $442 per pupil does include $12 in state pass-through funds for remedial programs. If these state remedial funds are counted as part of the state contribution, then the state share of implementing the GQE would amount to $14 per pupil, or about 3% of total current costs.

As illustrated in Table 7, a relatively small share of the costs (18%) goes toward direct testing expenses. The largest share (29%) is for remediation, although prevention services (28%) and professional development (25%) together make up more than half the total.

Another way of viewing these costs is in terms of the specific items they support. According to the A&M study, the bulk of the local expenses, about 86%, are for personnel—mostly school-level teachers, but also assessment and curriculum specialists, supervisory personnel, aides, and clerical assistants. The remaining 14% goes
toward such items as instructional materials and supplies related to exit exams, special technology and software, and transportation for students to remedial programs.

The study found that superintendents and principals have covered these current costs mainly by shifting existing funds—mostly state general per pupil aid—toward programs critical to exit exam performance and away from less urgent priorities. Generally, this means shifting support toward students who are having difficulty mastering the material in state standards and away from students who are unlikely to fail or subjects that are not tested. For example, the size of advanced math classes may be increased to free up teaching funds for more basic instruction. In programs such as special education and Title I that are already targeted toward students with learning challenges, resources are shifted toward preparation for and remediation after the GQE.

Estimated Costs of Higher Performance

The A&M study charged a second group of panels with determining what resources it would take for a hypothetical Indiana district to raise the percentage of students initially passing either the math or language arts section of the GQE from 68% to 80% (the state definition of “commendable” school performance on the exam), to increase the percentage who initially pass both sections from 60% to 75%, and to raise the pass rates for minority, low-income, and disabled students by the same proportion as the general increase in performance.

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**TABLE 6: PER PUPIL COSTS OF STATE EXIT EXAMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local programs</th>
<th>$442 (includes $12 in designated state funds for remedial programs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State-level programs</td>
<td>$2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$444 per pupil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**TABLE 7: LOCAL GQE PROGRAM COSTS FOR CURRENT PERFORMANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of Costs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remediation</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The study estimated that to boost performance to this level would cost another $682 million per year, on top of the $442 million annually for current costs of the GQE. This would amount to an extra $685 per pupil per year—or a 150% increase over the estimated current costs. Put another way, these costs would be equivalent to an 8.5% increase in average per pupil expenditures across the state, or one extra dollar for every twelve dollars currently spent on K-12 education. The estimate assumes that all of these costs would go toward local programs, rather than state-level activities, since local school districts are ultimately responsible for increasing student achievement.

The panels in the A&M study emphasized that if students are going to meet the GQE performance goals by high school, they must be given sufficient opportunities in every grade, beginning with the elementary years, to learn the knowledge and skills embodied in state standards. Toward this end, the panels recommended such preventive strategies as strengthening early reading and math instruction and enhancing interventions for students at risk of school failure. Reading was particularly emphasized because the panels viewed it as a prerequisite to success in both language arts and math. They also recommended professional development to help teachers at all grades learn how to teach to state standards, use test data to modify instruction, develop more effective instructional methods for students with learning challenges, and similar purposes.

The panels counted these broader preventive strategies as costs of improvement on the GQE because: 1) these strategies were seen as essential to improvement on the GQE; 2) these activities were unlikely to occur without the spur of the GQE; and 3) reaching commendable levels on the GQE will confirm that these strategies are indeed related to exam performance and will lead to their continued funding. Education reform proposals that did not meet these criteria—such as full-day kindergarten, pre-school programs, and alternative ideas for organizing the school calendar—were not included in the cost estimates.

As shown in Table 8, about three-fourths of the estimated costs of raising performance would go toward prevention (43%) and professional development (31%). About one-fourth would go toward remediation (16%) and direct testing costs (10%).

These estimates suggest that as an exit exam program matures, the types of costs associated with it change. The GQE was first given in 1997 and became a requirement for graduation with the class of 2000. During the years soon after an exit exam requirement is introduced, school districts tend to focus their energies on implementing the new tests, familiarizing students and teachers with testing requirements, teaching test-taking skills and test preparation, establishing performance baselines, and providing remediation to students who fail. In keeping with these emphases, the current-performance cost estimate assumes that a significant share of the costs is devoted to testing expenses and remediation. Now that the GQE is well established, Indiana school districts are turning their attention toward improving test performance. The higher-performance cost estimate assumes that at this stage prevention and professional development activities will constitute a much larger share of the costs, while the share for testing expenses and remediation will shrink.

These estimates also imply that as time goes by, it will take more and more effort—and higher costs per student—to raise the pass rate by a specific increment. Those students who needed only extra motivation or remediation to succeed will
already have passed, and the group left behind will consist increasingly of the students with the greatest deficits. Addressing the needs of these students will require early prevention and astutely designed interventions, which costs more than remediation. The children with the very greatest deficits will require the most intensive, sustained, and individualized services, so success with the last group of students to pass could have a very high price per pupil.

As with current costs, the cost estimates for improved performance assume that the vast majority of funds will be used to support school-level personnel, mostly teachers. About 82% of the total estimate—or $561 of the $685 per pupil—would go for personnel costs. The remaining 18% would be devoted to instructional materials and supplies, special technology and software, and incidental expenses, such as transportation.

Unlike current costs, the additional costs of higher performance could not be met by shifting existing resources, but instead would require new funding, the A&M study concluded. Panelists felt that current funds were already being successfully used for high-priority tasks and that reallocating resources would only weaken the education system in the long run. This is especially true in districts with high concentrations of at-risk students, where there are few or no low-priority programs from which to shift resources.

It is important to remember that these per pupil cost estimates are averages. Some districts will need to spend much more per pupil, and some less, to meet state performance targets. The actual costs to school districts will vary dramatically,
largely due to variations in the percentage of students currently passing the tests. While some Indiana districts have first-try pass rates of more than 80% on both the math and language arts sections, other districts have pass rates in the 20% to 30% range. In Gary, South Bend, and Indianapolis, only 2 of the 29 high schools in these three cities have exit exam pass rates above 38%. In these three districts, as well as others with concentrations of low-income and low-achieving students, the costs of meeting state performance targets will likely exceed $685 per pupil. Addressing the mechanics of this distribution issue can be very touchy politically and would present another sizable challenge to states.

Issues for Policymakers to Consider

Drawing from the A&M study and the Center’s own research, the Center on Education Policy has identified several issues related to the costs of implementing exit exams that state and national policymakers ought to consider when they make decisions about their testing programs.

No Cheap Fix

The findings from the A&M study challenge the belief of some exit exam advocates that these exams in of themselves are sufficiently motivating to spur students to perform better and can offer an inexpensive route to improved education. According to this “motivational theory” of exit exams, students who know they must take a high-stakes test will work harder and learn more in the years leading up to that test. Students who fail the exam on the first try will be motivated to apply themselves more in their regular and remedial classes so they pass the next time. Yet the amount and pattern of costs outlined by the panels in the A&M study go well beyond this theory of motivation.

Although the tests may be motivating for some students, exit exams are not a cheap path to higher achievement. The study found that the bulk of the costs of the GQE go toward improving the performance of students with learning problems that begin in the early grades and are not caused by lack of motivation. Often, these students have learning disabilities or socioeconomic factors that put them at risk of school failure, and their motivational problems are as likely to be a consequence of their educational problems as the cause of them. Policymakers must recognize that their role does not end with mandating exit exams. Performance on the exams depends not only on how much effort students put forth, but also on how they are taught and what kinds of resources are available to help them learn.

Unidentified Costs and Funding Tradeoffs

Policymakers may not realize how much it costs to implement exit exams because so many of the current costs are unidentified—in other words, they have been subsidized by moving around existing funds and reallocating teachers’ instructional time. In the long run, however, these kinds of funding tradeoffs could be detrimental. For example, taking instructional time and resources away from advanced math courses to support more basic math could reduce learning opportunities for higher-
performing students. De-emphasizing history or science in favor of language arts could lead to declining achievement in those core subjects.

It is critical for policymakers to understand and acknowledge the kinds of funding tradeoffs school districts are making to cover the extra costs of implementing exit exams. Discussions about future exit exam policies should consider whether these funding tradeoffs are intended and acceptable.

**State Share of Funding**

The costs of raising performance could be substantial—more than school districts can be expected to meet by stretching existing funds even more thinly. Yet the evidence from both the A&M study and the Center’s own state surveys suggests that several states are covering only a small portion of the excess local costs of implementing exit exams and have not made provision to help with the even greater future costs. If state leaders expect their exit exam programs to lead to significantly higher achievement, then states should cover more of the costs, not only for remediation, but also for prevention and professional development, which both the current-performance and higher-performance panels considered to be critical.

Whether state leaders and the public are willing to make a substantial investment to achieve higher student performance will depend, to some extent, on whether exit exams begin to show the improvements claimed by their sponsors. If exit exams are seen as a distracting waste of time, then even small expenditures will be seen as too much. If these exams are seen as the crucial pinnacle of a program of standards-based testing that vastly improves an otherwise ineffectual education, then larger expenditures will be acceptable. If the verdict falls somewhere in between, then decisions about costs may depend on whether a particular expenditure seems to contribute to higher student achievement and how closely it is linked to exit exams in the public mind.

**No Child Left Behind**

The A&M study did not address the costs of meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act because NCLB does not mandate an exit exam and has different requirements that imply somewhat different types of preparation. Nevertheless, the state experience with exit exams is relevant to NCLB because both policies are part of the same broad movement toward standards-based assessment and test-based accountability. If anything, NCLB could have a stronger influence on local actions than exit exams because its performance goals are more ambitious than those of many state exit exams. Under NCLB, test-based consequences for schools start well before high school, and virtually all students, not just 75% or another percentage, are expected to eventually meet the state’s definition of proficient performance. NCLB also requires steady increases in test scores among every major subgroup of students, including minority students, poor children, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

The findings of the A&M study could be considered a forecast of the types of costs, resources, and funding tradeoffs involved in implementing NCLB. It is likely
that the costs of achieving the more ambitious NCLB goals will be considerable. The U.S. General Accounting Office estimated the costs of implementing the tests required by NCLB to be anywhere from $1.9 billion to $5.3 billion nationally, depending on whether the tests are restricted to multiple-choice items or include open-ended questions (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). This estimate, however, includes only the costs of developing, administering, scoring, and reporting on the tests, not the greater costs of providing remediation, professional development, and prevention strategies that will undoubtedly be necessary to help meet the NCLB performance goals. If anything, school districts may need to apply these strategies more widely and intensively to accomplish the NCLB agenda than they will for exit exams.

The Indiana experience with exit exams also implies that although school districts can cover some priorities by reallocating existing resources, this only works up to a point—and that point has probably been reached in most places, given the current economic climate. National policymakers must provide significant new funding if they expect school districts to raise achievement across the board, as envisioned by NCLB.

**Future Research on Costs**

The Augenblick & Myers study concluded that the method tested in Indiana was successful in producing informed estimates about costs and could be applied to other states. The researchers suggested some refinements to the method, such as giving each expert panel a single, clearly defined task but offering more variety of tasks across panels; taking more aggressive steps to ensure racial diversity on the panels; and scheduling state visits and panel meetings in fall or early spring.

Many unanswered questions remain about the costs of exit exams that could be illuminated with further research. It would be useful to know more about such questions as:

- How much costs vary among states or regions and whether different states emphasize different kinds of expenditures to fulfill the goals of exit exams.
- Whether costs vary for the different types of exit exams, such as minimum competency, standards-based, and end-of-course exams.
- How the costs of exit exams and spending priorities change over time as states enter different phases of implementation; for example, do states with newer exit exams put more emphasis on remediation than states with more mature testing systems?
- How differences in student characteristics and exam features affect costs; for example, do implementation costs differ for special populations? Are the extra per pupil resources that districts generally receive for special education students, English language learners, and other special populations sufficient to cover these students’ needs for additional services related to exit exams?

A study of multiple states at different stages of implementing exit exams could help answer some of these questions. During the next year, the Center on Education hopes to expand this type of research to include four more states.
What Major Challenges Do States Face As They Implement Exit Exams?

HIGHLIGHTS

■ Several states revised or delayed their exit exam requirements in 2002-03 in response to growing public opposition, high failure rates, lawsuits, and concerns about negative effects of the tests on students. So far, most of these changes have affected small numbers of students or bought states time to fix problems with the tests before diplomas are withheld. But the debates over these policy changes show how difficult it is for states to strike a balance that will address legitimate concerns about the tests and lessen negative effects for students without undermining the core exit exam requirements.

■ Most states with exit exams, either current or planned, intend to use these tests to comply with the high school testing requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. But to do this they must make hard choices about whether to aim for a 100% pass rate on the exit exams by 2014, which scores to count for NCLB accountability when a student takes an exit exam more than once, how much to change the exam’s content and phase-in schedules to conform with NCLB mandates, and how to ensure that exit exams do not adversely affect graduation rates, which are another measure of school progress under NCLB.

■ The majority of states report that they require school districts to provide remediation services to students who fail the state’s exit exams, but only a few require all students who have failed the exam to actually attend remedial classes. Generally, states have provided only limited targeted funding for remediation; only four states report that they pick up most or all of the costs of remediation.

■ Most states are providing professional development to help teachers prepare their students for exit exams, but few are going so far as to provide teachers...
with lesson plans and curriculum guides aligned with the content being tested. Only four states responding to our survey said they had developed lesson plans based on the exams, and only five states reported developing these types of curriculum guides.

- The majority of states provide alternate paths to a diploma—such as waivers of or appeals to the exam requirement, substitute tests, alternate tests or alternate forms of test administration, and acceptance of coursework and exams from other states—for students struggling to pass exit exams. Many states also award certificates of attendance in lieu of a regular diploma for students with disabilities (or in some states, any students) who repeatedly fail the exams but meet other graduation requirements. Nevertheless, states continue to debate how far to go in exempting students from exit exams requirements or otherwise modifying the testing requirements for students with special needs.

- Until recently, there has been little effort to link the content of exit exams with requirements for college admission or expectations for what entering college students should know. Only a few public higher education systems explicitly consider students’ high school exit exam results when making decisions about admissions, scholarships, or course placement, but most universities require students to have a diploma before they can enroll. However, there are signs that higher education institutions are beginning to pay more attention to exit exam results.

Challenges in 2003

States face several challenges as they proceed with exit exams. In our 2002 baseline report, we discussed the challenges of setting passing scores, ensuring that students have an opportunity to learn the material being tested, building public support for the exams, using tests appropriately, and including special populations in testing. Although these challenges persist, they are by no means the only ones. Some issues that were merely brewing in 2002 have become major concerns in 2003, as more students find their diplomas withheld and as other effects of exit exam requirements become more apparent.

Based on responses to our state survey and our analysis of events during the past year, we have focused this year’s report on seven major challenges states must confront as they implement exit exams:

1. Striking a balance that addresses public concerns about exit exams without diluting the exam requirements;
2. Dealing with legal challenges to these exams;
3. Coordinating exit exam programs with the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act;
4. Providing adequate supports to students and teachers to ensure students have an adequate opportunity to pass these exams;
5. Offering options to help struggling students earn a diploma;
6. Addressing the needs of special student populations in exit exam systems; and
7. Linking exit exams with higher education.
These challenges apply both to states that already have mandatory exit exams and those that are preparing to attach a graduation requirement to an existing exam. Most of the states mentioned in this chapter already have exit exams in place, but others are phasing in a new exam to replace an old one or are implementing their first exit exam system.

**Striking a Balance in Response to Public Opposition**

More than any other issue, the prospect of withholding diplomas from students has awakened the public and the media to the implications of exit exams. Although several states had already been withholding diplomas, the rules changed in several states in 2003, often in ways intended to inject more rigor into exit exam requirements. In spring 2003, Massachusetts began withholding diplomas for the first time. Florida, Mississippi, and Nevada moved from minimum competency exams to standards-based or end-of-course exams and began withholding diplomas based on the new, reputedly tougher tests. Louisiana, New Jersey, and New York revised their mandatory exit exams or added new subject area tests. Three other states—Alaska, California, and Virginia—made preparations to begin withholding diplomas from the class of 2004, based on new or revised tests.

In many of these states, reports of low pass rates or large numbers of students on the verge of being denied diplomas have attracted considerable media attention and intensified public opposition to the exams. Parents, students, civil rights advocates, anti-testing groups, and others have pressured state leaders to back down on exit exam requirements. Opponents of these exams contend that state governments are using tests to exert excessive control over local schools; that schools are not adequately teaching students the knowledge and skills being tested; that a single test should not be used to make such a serious decision as whether a student deserves a high school diploma; and that exit exams are particularly unfair for students with disabilities or other special needs. To buttress this last assertion, advocacy groups in several states pointed to wide gaps in pass rates.

This simmering disgruntlement reflects the ambivalence that exists in public attitudes about high-stakes testing. As we observed in our 2002 report on exit exams, the critics of these tests, while vocal and aggressive in getting out their messages, do not represent the majority of citizens. Public opinion polls show that the majority of citizens support the broad goals of high school exit exams (e.g., Business Roundtable, 2000; Mass Insight Education, 2002; Johnson & Duffett, 2002). At the same time, the public—and especially parents—have reservations about the uses of test results and the emphasis placed on them. Although a large majority of parents surveyed by Public Agenda, a nonprofit research firm, agreed that tests are an effective way to measure whether students are meeting standards, a majority also felt that schools placed too much emphasis on standardized test scores and that it was not fair to put so much pressure on students based on the results of one test (Johnson & Duffett, 2002).

State leaders cannot afford to ignore criticisms of exit exams, because mounting resistance could eventually undermine broader public support for the tests and because opponents raise some legitimate issues that need to be addressed. Aware of these factors, state policymakers have acted quickly to try to minimize ill effects on
students and calm public opposition without backing down too much from their
exit exam requirements. This is a difficult balance to achieve, however. Some state
exit exam requirements may be unrealistically ambitious or naïve about possible
consequences and may need to be revised, but when and how to revise them is not
always clear. If state leaders hang tough and wait, diplomas could be withheld from
an unacceptably large percentage of students, creating an insurmountable backlash
and discrediting test-based reform for the foreseeable future. But if states are too
quick to make changes in response to public pressure, they could erode the viabili-
ity of tests as a reform tool.

States have addressed this challenge in different ways. Some have created or ex-
panded options for waivers or exemptions of exam requirements for students who
have repeatedly failed the tests, while others have instituted alternative routes to a
diploma. Some states have postponed the effective dates for withholding diplomas
or suspended new mandatory exit exams. A small number of states have lowered
the cut scores required to pass their exit exams or are examining the content of
their tests to determine whether they are too hard. And a few states have resisted
making changes. The variety of state responses, described below, shows how chal-
lenging it is to arrive at a balanced approach that will calm public opposition while
maintaining core requirements of the exit exam system. The issue is further com-
plicated by the lack of extensive research on crucial aspects of exit exams.

Massachusetts

In spring 2003, tensions ran high as Massachusetts, a state that was already home to a
sizable anti-testing contingent, prepared to administer the MCAS. Across the state,
pockets of students walked out of their classrooms when the exam was being given
and simply refused to take it, often with support from their parents (Rothstein, 2003,
April 11). A handful of local school boards joined the fight, voting to ignore the
state’s graduation testing requirement. The Massachusetts Department of Education
responded that those districts that give a diploma to students who fail the MCAS
could see their superintendents’ licenses taken away (Rothstein, 2003, April 29).

Based on the results of the spring testing, Massachusetts school districts pre-
pared to withhold diplomas from about 4,800 members of the class of 2003 who
had not passed the MCAS (Associated Press, 2003). In the Boston public schools, to
cite just one example, approximately three-quarters of the high school seniors (455
of 636 students) who would not be graduating because they failed the MCAS
would otherwise have graduated because they met all other graduation require-
ments (Rothstein, 2003, May 15).

As explained below, the Massachusetts board of education had already decided
in 2003 to create a “certificate of achievement” for students who met all local grad-
uation requirements and attempted but failed to meet the MCAS requirement. But
many policymakers felt that creating a second-tier credential did not go far enough.
In May, the Massachusetts House of Representatives voted to allow some students
with disabilities who had repeatedly failed the MCAS to receive diplomas, a change
that would slightly reduce the number of students being denied diplomas. Some
members of the Massachusetts Senate went beyond the House’s proposal and sug-
gested granting diplomas to students in bilingual, vocational, and special education
programs who had failed the MCAS. Those additions were rejected. At the end of June, the governor vetoed a budget amendment, passed by both the House and Senate, which would apply only to students with disabilities who had failed the MCAS. In July, the legislature decided not to attempt to override his veto.

**California**

California, which was slated to withhold diplomas beginning in 2004, was also the site of anti-testing protests. In Los Angeles, students, parents, and teachers rallied outside the Los Angeles Unified School District headquarters to protest the exit exam, and student delegations met with state Board of Education members (Ragland & Hayasaki, 2003). A group called Californians for Justice released a report titled *First Things First* (2003), highlighting what the group saw as inadequacies and inequalities in schools that serve students of color, low-income students, and English language learners. The report argued that the California exit exam punishes students for the state’s own failure to provide an equitable, high-quality education to all students. At a community speak-out in Oakland, Californians for Justice joined students and teachers in calling on lawmakers to fix California’s schools before withholding diplomas (Shire, 2003).

On May 1, 2003, HumRRO released its mandated study of the California exit exam system. The study projected that about 20% of high school seniors would be denied diplomas next year unless the state delayed the consequences of the CAHSEE (Wise et al., 2003). Alarmed by these statistics and concerned about public opposition, the state school board debated whether to delay the CAHSEE graduation requirement until 2006. Reed Hastings, the president of the state board, came out in favor of delaying the test, noting that the prospect of failing to graduate one-fifth of the state’s seniors next year is “not politically or legally acceptable” (Olson, 2003). Anticipating a delay, the state decided to cancel the July 2003 administration of the CAHSEE. In July, the board voted to postpone the exit exam mandate until 2006.

**Florida**

Perhaps the most extreme acts of resistance took place in Florida, which introduced a new standards-based exit exam required for graduation beginning with the class of 2003. In May 2003, Florida state leaders announced that approximately 12,500 high school seniors in the state—many of whom were African American and Hispanic—would not receive diplomas because they had not passed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (Rabin, 2003). Dozens of community activists and politicians protested the test, claiming that the state’s education system does not adequately prepare students to pass it and that minority students disproportionately suffer its negative consequences. To make their point, the protesters tried a new tactic, threatening a boycott of the state’s tourism, sugar, and citrus industries to nudge Governor Jeb Bush to do something to rectify recent FCAT results (Rabin, 2003; Pinzur, 2003).

The state had already modified exit exam requirements earlier in 2003. In January, the state education board decided to allow a few accommodations for students with disabilities taking the FCAT. In March, Florida’s House went a step fur-
ther and voted to exempt some students with disabilities from the FCAT requirement altogether and allow them to demonstrate competency through other methods. In April, the governor signed this legislation.

In June, Florida added more new options for students who fail the FCAT, although together these options will affect only a limited number of students. The state decided to award “certificates of completion” to students who have failed the FCAT and to offer a new fast-track GED program over the summer for these students. English language learners who fail the test would also get additional help in the form of intensive English courses; through adult education courses, these students could then take the FCAT as many times as they like. In June, the governor also signed legislation that allows scores on other exams—including the SAT, PSAT, ACT, PLAN, the College Placement Test, and military entrance exams—to be substituted for FCAT results as a graduation requirement. This law will be in effect for only one year but may be extended. This year, the change will benefit only about 400 of the seniors who had not passed the FCAT (James, 2003).

Nevada

Nevada lawmakers had already delayed the state’s science test requirement of the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) until the 2003-04 school year. In December 2002, the Education Committee of the State Assembly recommended another delay, since the No Child Left Behind Act does not yet require high school students to be tested in science. State education officials have stated that these delays are due largely to budgetary problems in the state, but the effect is still to decrease graduation requirements for students.

Public concern about the state’s exit exam grew after it was reported that only 36% of Nevada students passed the math portion of the exam on the first try. The Nevada legislature debated several possible changes in the exam, to be effective this year. On April 9, the Assembly Education Committee voted to turn the HSPE into an endorsement on the students’ diplomas indicating which sections were passed, instead of a requirement for graduation. Support for that proposal was very limited, however. The president of the state board of education opposed it, saying it was a mistake to lower the bar for graduation, and the state superintendent of education, although in favor of providing more information on diplomas, did not come out for the bill (Richmond, 2003, April 14). The legislator who proposed this bill backed away from it somewhat and instead proposed suspending the math portion of the HSPE for two to four years while its content is reviewed and possibly adjusted. On May 19, the state Assembly approved a two-year moratorium on the math portion of the exam, but that proposal eventually died in the Senate. In the end, the more drastic proposals to suspend or delay the exam mandate were rejected. The state took a milder stance, deciding only to temporarily lower the cut score on the math test from 304 to 290, then to gradually raise it over time to the previous level. In Clark County, where Las Vegas is located, this change was estimated to lower the number of students denied diplomas from more than 1,600 to around 600 (Richmond, 2003, June 10).
New York

In April 2003, the New York Post reported that more than one-quarter of the public school students in New York City’s class of 2002 could not graduate because they did not meet the Regents exit exam requirement (Campanile, 2003). But this was just the beginning of what became a major controversy over the Regents end-of-course tests. At the center of the dispute was the newly introduced June 2003 version of the Math A Regents exam. Teachers and students throughout the state complained that the math test was inordinately difficult, and the pass rate on the test fell from about 61% on the previous test version to about 37% (Arenson, 2003, July 2).

After considerable debate, the state commissioner of education decided to nullify the results of the June 2003 Math A exam for juniors and seniors. The decision allows local authorities to give diplomas to seniors who failed the exam but passed their math courses and to certify that juniors who failed that exam have satisfied the math graduation requirements. The commissioner also planned to appoint a panel to review the math test and determine why it was giving students so much trouble. The controversy did not end there, however. When the commissioner decided to reassign the director of the state’s testing division in response to pressure from the state Regents, the director chose to resign instead (Arenson, 2003, July 1).

Other States

In addition to these fixes in states where consequences for students were imminent, states where graduation requirements have not yet kicked in are planning ahead for the near and distant future.

- In Texas this year, students began taking the state’s new exit exam, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Although diplomas will not be withheld until 2005, concerns about pass rates led the state board of education to agree to phase in higher passing scores over two years.

- In Maryland, the State Board of Education voted to delay the consequences for the Maryland High School Assessment (HSA), making the class of 2008, rather than the class of 2007, the first to have to pass the HSA to graduate.

- In Utah, members of a legislative task force have agreed to pursue legislation that would eliminate the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test because they believe recent legislation has made the testing system unnecessary. Instead, the state Board of Education proposes that students should show competency through course grades and existing end-of-year tests (Lynn, 2003).

Other states are more wary of making adjustments to their exit exam systems. Louisiana, for example, has maintained its mandates, even though initial pass rates dropped from 74% to 65% in math and from 81% to 78% in English when the state introduced a new version of the Graduation Exit Exam, the GEE 21 (Brown, 2003). Mississippi has also held fast, despite the introduction of a new standards-based exam. Although Virginia plans to withhold diplomas next year based on the results of the new Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, the governor has already stated publicly that the requirement will not go away in that state (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 2003). However, the state could still make other adjustments to the exam or its testing policies.
Implications of Changes in Testing Programs

What are the implications of this trend among states to amend exit exam requirements? State leaders themselves do not always agree. Some maintain that the changes being made in their states are a necessary and sensible way to make the exams fairer and give students, teachers, and state officials more time to prepare for them. Other state leaders see these actions as a setback in the push to establish stricter standards.

Most of the changes made by states so far have affected a limited number of students and have kept intact the core exit exam requirements. The delays have given states a chance to regroup and monitor the effects of exams before applying serious consequences for students. The adjustments have generally allowed limited exceptions while maintaining exam mandates for the vast majority of students. In most circumstances, a delay or limited adjustment may be the most rational option. Major change takes time. As demonstrated by the experience of states that have had exit exams for several years, pass rates tend to go up over time.

The pressure to retreat from exit exam requirements is unlikely to end here, however. States must continually evaluate whether proposed changes represent a rational response to public concerns or a merely expedient reaction. If states are too quick to make concessions when faced with short-term difficulties, exit exams will lose strength as a reform tool, and students, educators, and the public will begin to see exit exams as another educational fad that will eventually pass. Whether states will stick with their current policies or make further revisions depends on many factors, such as whether the fiscal crisis affecting states improves, whether student achievement rises, whether public opposition continues to grow, and how the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act are implemented by states and perceived by the public.

Dealing with Legal Challenges to Exit Exams

Some of the resistance to exit exams has taken the form of lawsuits, which is not surprising given the high stakes attached to exit exams. In our 2002 report, we summarized major legal challenges that have been brought against high school exit exams over the years. Most of these lawsuits have argued that the tests are unfair for students who have not had sufficient opportunity to learn the material being tested and/or students with special needs.

Two ongoing lawsuits focus on these fairness issues. In California, thousands of disabled students have joined in a class action lawsuit against the state, Chapman v. California Department of Education, filed in 2002 in federal court. The plaintiffs claim that the CAHSEE discriminates against students with disabilities in four ways: by not providing an alternative test, by failing to establish specific procedures for students requesting accommodations, by failing to create an appeals process if requests for accommodations are denied, and by testing disabled students on material they have not been taught.

Since the lawsuit was filed, the plaintiffs say the state has begun to address some of the their complaints, such as offering a waiver process for accommodations and passing a bill to create an alternative assessment for students with disabilities. But as
evidenced by the 90% failure rate on the CAHSEE among students with disabili-
ties, the state has yet to ensure these students are being taught what they need to
know to pass the test (Education Assessment Insider, 2003). In December 2002, the
lawsuit was amended to ask the state to simply exempt students with disabilities
from the exit exam requirements. The amended suit also asks that a warning be
posted on each test, akin to the warning labels on cigarette packages, saying that
the exams may not be valid—meaning that students may not have been taught the
material on the exam. The suit further calls on the state to consider delaying the
exam requirement for all students (Asimov, 2003).

In Massachusetts, eight students who were in danger of not getting diplomas
because they failed the MCAS filed a class-action lawsuit in fall 2002 to try to stop
the state from giving the test. The students claimed that the state violated the rights
of minority and disabled students and English language learners by not adequately
preparing them for the exam. At the time the suit was filed, about 50% of black and
Latino high school seniors and students with disabilities had not passed the test in
three tries, although the most recent results released by the state show improve-
ments. The court judge ruled that the state could continue to use the test while a
final resolution to the case is pending. At the same time, she criticized the state for
delays in devising curriculum guidelines for the subjects covered by the test, a situ-
ation that has caused confusion among students and teachers (Keynes, 2003, April
7; Ring, 2003). After the state court denied the plaintiffs’ request for a preliminary
injunction, they took their case to a federal court. In May, the federal judge denied
the request to bar the state from using the exit exam. Despite evidence that some
students had not been prepared well enough, Judge Michael A. Ponsor said that
lawyers failed to convince him that the courts should intervene in a policy matter
that was decided by the state legislature, calling it “a painful decision, but in my
opinion, not even a close call” (McElhenny, 2003).

Legal challenges have also focused on scoring errors in exit exams, including
two cases settled during this past year in Minnesota and Nevada. In Minnesota, a
settlement was reached in November 2002 in a case involving widespread scoring
errors that occurred several years earlier and caused 8,000 students—from 8th
graders to high school seniors—to be told they had failed the exit exam when they
actually had passed. Several dozen students missed their graduation ceremonies be-
cause of errors. A class action lawsuit was brought against the test publishing com-
pany, NCS Pearson, and was scheduled to go to trial in October 2002 when the
testing company and the plaintiffs reached a settlement. The company agreed to
pay up to $7 million to students as part of the settlement. Students who did not get
to attend their graduation ceremonies are eligible for up to $16,000 each, and those
who suffered lesser consequences, such as being forced to attend summer school,
will receive a lesser payment (Pugmire, 2002).

As part of the settlement of a lawsuit in Nevada, the state’s testing contractor,
Harcourt Educational Measurement Corporation, was assessed a $425,000 penalty
for making errors in scoring. Harcourt told 736 high school sophomores and jun-
iors they had failed the state exit exam when they should have passed. Harcourt
also agreed to pay for an independent audit team to assess its performance for the
rest of its contract with the state (Associated Press, 2002).
Coordinating Exit Exams with the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the dominant force shaping testing policies in all states, whether or not they have exit exams. States are spending considerable effort and money to bring their testing and accountability systems in line with the far-reaching demands of this new federal law, which took effect in school year 2002-03. (For more information about state progress in carrying out the provisions of this Act, see the Center’s 2003 report, From the Capital to the Classroom: State and Federal Efforts to Implement the No Child Left Behind Act.)

The Act requires states, by school year 2005-06, to test all students in reading and mathematics in each of the grades 3 through 8 and at least once between grades 10 and 12. Beginning in school year 2007-08, states must also test students annually in science in at least one grade at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Thus, although the law requires all states to have high school tests, these tests do not have to be exit exams tied to graduation. Scores on these assessments will be used to determine whether schools and districts are making “adequate yearly progress,” as the Act terms it, in raising achievement, and to identify which Title I schools will be subject to sanctions and rewards.

Most states with exit exams, either current or planned, intend to use these tests to comply with the high school testing requirements of NCLB. As Figure 8 illustrates, 17 of the 24 states with exit exams plan to use these tests to meet the testing requirements of NCLB.

**FIGURE 8: STATES’ PLANS FOR USING EXIT EXAMS TO COMPLY WITH THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT**

| Planning to use the exam: AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MA, MS, NV, NJ, NY, OH, TN, VA, WA (17) |
| Not planning to use the exam: MD, MN, NM, NC, SC, TX, UT (7) |

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, June 2003.
There are compelling reasons why states with exit exams would want to use them for NCLB accountability purposes. First, this approach minimizes the amount of testing students must undergo. Requiring students to sit for two series of tests—one for NCLB and one for graduation—would take more time away from classroom instruction and would cost the state significantly more money.

Second, NCLB requires 95% of students in the target grades to participate in testing. Motivating high school students to participate in NCLB-related exams and take them seriously may be more difficult if the test does not hold meaningful consequences for students. Minnesota, which is using a different test from its exit exam to comply with NCLB, is confronting this issue of motivation. Minnesota’s high school exit exam, the Basic Skills Test, cannot be used to comply with NCLB because it is not aligned to state standards and because two of its sections are given in grade 8, rather than in grades 10 through 12 as the Act requires. Instead, the state is administering the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) for NCLB purposes. To keep students from skipping the MCA, several districts in the state, including St. Paul and Anoka-Hennepin, plan to put MCA scores on students’ transcripts (Welbes, 2003). District officials maintain that they must use whatever leverage is available to motivate students to make an effort on the test, which otherwise has high stakes for schools but not for students.

A state that decided to use its exit exams for NCLB purposes had to make some important decisions to conform the exit exam to the Act’s requirements. The first decision involved the state’s definition of adequate yearly progress for schools in the states—a definition that had to be submitted in a plan to the U.S. Department of Education by January 31, 2003. Under the timetable for progress laid out in the Act, 100% of the state’s students must perform at the “proficient” level by 2014, with proficiency defined by the state and measured by scores on whatever state tests are used for NCLB. States had to decide whether this is a reasonable goal for their exit exams and whether the proficient level of performance for NCLB should be the same as the passing score on the exit exam or lower.

A second key decision was related to which scores on the exit exam would “count” for NCLB accountability. Most states allow multiple retest opportunities for students. It would seem to be advantageous for states to count the score on the final retest as the official NCLB score, because the total percentage of students passing the test over time should increase with each retest. Tracking student results over time can be very difficult, however, because of inadequate data systems. For many states, the first time a student takes the test may be the most practical one to count, even though it presents a greater challenge in terms of reaching 100% proficiency. Indeed, the NCLB regulations require states to use the first score a student obtains to make their calculations of adequate yearly progress. However, the U.S. Department of Education has approved some plans that vary from this policy. Reflecting this practice, most of the states in our survey reported that they are using the first administration of their exit exam for NCLB accountability. However, two states, Alabama and New York, are using later administrations of the test.

A third set of decisions involves the science testing requirement of NCLB. If the state’s exit exam currently tests in science, will that test be used to meet the science requirement of NCLB? If the exit exam does not include science, will the new science exam be made into a graduation requirement? States have a few years
to make these decisions, since the science tests do not have to be in place until 2008, so no comprehensive data are available. Mississippi reports that it does not plan to use its end-of-course exit exam in biology to meet the science requirement. In Massachusetts, the state board of education has proposed adding a science exam to the MCAS by 2006.

Some states do not plan to use their exit exams to meet NCLB requirements. Along with Minnesota, they include Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. There are other reasons, in addition to the adequate yearly progress issue outlined above, why a state might choose to keep its exit exam separate. In New Mexico, for example, the exit exam is a minimum competency exam not aligned to state standards, so it would not meet the standards-based focus of NCLB. South Carolina is currently phasing in an exit exam that is aligned to state standards, and it, rather than the current exam with consequences, will be used for NCLB.

The schedule for phasing in the exit exam can also be inconsistent with NCLB. Utah, for example, does not plan to begin administering its high school exit exam until February 2004. Even if the state wanted to use the exit exam for NCLB, it would have to use another exam for NCLB requirements and then switch to the exit exam. Results may not be comparable across the tests, which could cause problems with the state’s accountability system.

Finally, exit exams may not be constructed to yield the kinds of results required by NCLB. For example, the new North Carolina High School Exit Exam, which the state had planned to phase in during the spring of 2004, would have been organized into four domains spanning the state’s curriculum. Rather than consisting of subject area tests, the exam would have included the following four tests: Communication, Processing Information, Problem Solving, and Using Numbers and Data. This format could make it difficult to produce the separate “math” and “reading” results required by NCLB. Until the state can clarify whether this new exam will meet NCLB requirements, the North Carolina House has voted to suspend implementation of the exam indefinitely. As of June 23, the Senate had yet to take action on this matter. For the time being, the state plans to use the North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test to meet NCLB requirements, a state test that previously had been used only for students in Title I schools but will now be administered to all 10th graders.

Georgia made a similar decision to convert its new end-of-course exams from mandatory exit exams into diagnostic tests. State leaders were unsure whether these tests would comply with the NCLB mandate to test 95% of all students at least once during high school, because the tests were in specific subjects, such as algebra, geometry, physical science, and biology, that were taken by less than 95% of the students in a given grade (Tofig, 2003).

In our 2002 report, we pointed to a potentially problematic tension between the requirements of NCLB and the goals of state exit exams. Under NCLB, graduation rates are one of the indicators states must use to determine whether districts are making adequate yearly progress. This could discourage states from adopting exit exams or setting high pass scores on these tests, out of concern that these actions could result in lower graduation rates and end up identifying schools and districts as needing improvement under NCLB. Although this may be happening, our survey gave no evidence that this has been a factor in states’ decisions during school year 2002–03. In fact, Massachusetts and California have incorporated their exit exams
into their methods of defining graduation rates for NCLB purposes. Until 2005, Massachusetts plans to use an interim measure for the graduation rate that is based on the percentage of students who took the 10th grade MCAS and graduated two years later with a competency determination (the MCAS graduation standard). California intends to use results from its CAHSEE test as a proxy for the high school graduation rate until the state has a student data system in place that would allow longitudinal tracking of individual students from grade 9 through graduation.

**Providing Adequate Supports to Students and Teachers**

With significant initial failure rates on several state exit exams, states are under mounting pressure to provide sufficient supports to students and teachers to ensure students have a reasonable opportunity to pass these exams. For students, these supports include high-quality instruction in their regular classes, as well as effective prevention and remediation services. For teachers, these supports include professional development and guidance about curriculum and instruction.

Support for remediation is an important part of ensuring that students who have failed high school exit examinations have an opportunity to learn the material being tested. The majority of states we surveyed reported that they require school districts to provide remediation services to students who fail the state’s exit exams, and the other states encourage districts to do so. (See Figure 9.)

**FIGURE 9: STATE REQUIREMENTS FOR REMEDIATION FOR STUDENTS WHO FAIL EXIT EXAMS**

| States that require school districts to provide remediation: | AL, CA, FL, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, NV, NJ, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (17) |
| States that do not require remediation: | AK, GA, MS, NM, WA (5) |

*Note:* Arizona did not answer this question, and Utah has no policy yet on remediation.
Only a few states, however, require all students who have failed the exam to actually attend remedial classes. These include Maryland, New York, and Tennessee. Some other states, such as Indiana and Ohio, do not require students to attend remediation, but students who fail to attend are not eligible to pursue a diploma through the states’ waiver and appeals processes.

In our 2002 report, we observed that states have not been very open-handed in providing funds for remediation. This continues to be the case, as confirmed by our 2003 state survey and our case study of exit exam costs in Indiana, reported in chapter 4. In the survey, we asked states whether they fully fund remediation services for students who fail the state high school exit exam. If the answer was no, we asked them what percentage of remedial costs the state covers and what percentage school districts are required to contribute. Not all states answered these questions. Calculating percentages of remediation support is not an easy task for states. Most could only say that they do not fully fund remediation services and that districts share the costs. In three states (Ohio, Utah, and Washington), no funds were earmarked for remediation simply because the tests we profiled are not yet required of students.

Among states that were able to give exact figures, two (Massachusetts and Nevada) reported that they pay 100% of remediation costs; both are states that also require districts to provide remediation to students who fail the test. At the other end of the spectrum, three states (Alabama, Minnesota, and New Mexico) reported that districts are expected to pick up 100% of these costs. (This is also likely the case in the several states that did not answer our question.) Among these four states that do not provide specific funding for remediation, three nevertheless require districts to provide remedial services; only New Mexico does not. In a few other states, the approximate split between state and district funds varied, with 67% provided by the state in Indiana and 75% provided by Louisiana.

Support for remediation is not limited to funding. We also asked states whether they had developed preparation and remediation materials and programs for their high school exit exams, such as after-school and weekend tutorial programs, computer-based programs, and study guides for students. Twelve states said that they provided these kinds of materials or programs, including Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Study guides and computer-based programs were the most common types of support provided.

Professional development opportunities and state-developed materials and programs are also important components of both remediation and initial student preparation. We asked states whether they supported or had established professional development programs to help teachers prepare students for the state high school exit exams. Examples of these programs include training teachers how to interpret test results and understand the exams’ scoring rubrics, teaching teachers how to instruct students in test-taking skills, and familiarizing teachers with the content covered on the exit exam and with intervention strategies for students at risk of failing. The majority of states reported supporting these types of programs. Almost all states reported that they are either providing some type of professional development related to the exit exam or are unsure about the types of professional development they will provide because their exit exam systems are still in development.
Only two states specifically said that they did not support or develop professional development around exit exams—Minnesota and New Mexico. They did not give reasons in our survey why they have not supported or established professional development programs specifically for exit exams. However, their decisions may be related to the fact that both have relatively high initial pass rates and are the only states to say their exit exams are not tied to specific grade-level standards but rather measure basic skills—skills that teachers are already expected to be well prepared to teach.

State responses were less encouraging when it came to providing teachers with specific lesson plans and curriculum guides explicitly aimed at helping them prepare their students for exit exams. Although most states said they provide some type of informational guide to teachers explaining the exit exams, only four states (Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia) reported developing these types of lesson plans, and only five (Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia) reported developing such curriculum guides.

Offering Options to Help Struggling Students Earn a Diploma

States are instituting a variety of options to help students who are struggling to pass exit exams earn a diploma. (These options are distinct from the graduation options available for special education students, discussed in the next section of this chapter.) Providing alternate options for earning a diploma not only helps students, but also helps states maintain the political viability of their exit exam systems amid the anti-testing sentiments that are bound to arise when significant numbers of students fail the exam.

According to our 2003 survey, several states provide special options or alternate routes to a regular diploma for students who are unable to pass exit exams. These options vary so much from state to state that it is not easy to classify them or count the numbers of states offering particular options. What we do provide below are broad descriptions of the types of options available for students, with examples from specific states about how these options work. These options include waivers or appeals, substitute tests, alternate assessments, alternate types of test administration, coursework and exams from other states. We also provide descriptions of certificates or district diplomas, which many states offer in lieu of a diploma. More detail on each state’s policies can be found in the State Profiles at the end of this report.

Waivers or Appeal Processes

In 2002, the Center reported that several states have processes for waiving the exam requirement for students who repeatedly fail state exams or hearing appeals. In last year’s report, we highlighted two such systems in Indiana and Massachusetts. Data from our 2003 survey reveal that at least four other states—Georgia, Ohio, Mississippi, and New Mexico—have similar processes in place.

States vary as to how specific they are in the criteria students must meet to be granted a waiver or succeed in an appeal. Ohio, for example, has developed a very
detailed waiver process for the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT), an exit exam system currently being phased in. A student who has passed four of the five tests that comprise the OGT but has failed in attempts to pass the remaining one can still receive a diploma if the student meets all of the following criteria. Students must have:

- Scored within 10 points of the proficient level on the failed test;
- Maintained a 97% attendance rate through all four years of high school without being expelled during those four years;
- Attained a grade point average of at least 2.5 out of 4.0 in the subject area covered by the failed test and completed the curriculum requirements in that subject area;
- Participated in any intervention programs offered by the school and maintained a 97% attendance rate in any program offered outside the normal school day; and
- Obtained letters from high school subject area teachers and the high school principal recommending that the student be allowed to graduate with a diploma.

Mississippi has a multi-step appeals process but is less specific about the evidence students must provide. The state guidelines say only that “the student, parent or district personnel must submit a written statement with supporting evidence indicating that the student has mastered the subject area curriculum and outlining reasons the student might be successful with a substitute evaluation” (Mississippi State Board of Education, 2001).

The Ohio and Mississippi processes are state-level options available to all students in the state. Minnesota has taken a slightly different approach. Although the state has not established standard alternate routes to a regular diploma at the state level, school districts may institute their own alternate routes for students who have failed a state exit exam.

Substitute Tests

As we reported in 2002, at least two states (New York and Virginia) allow students to use substitute tests in place of their state exit exams to qualify for a diploma. The eligible tests in these two states include AP, SAT, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education, ACT, Cambridge International Examinations, College Level Examination Program (CLEP), and others.

More recent information from our 2003 survey indicates that other states also have this option. North Carolina allows substitute tests but does not have a specific list of eligible tests. Rather, the state simply says that a student’s competency for a diploma may be screened by using scores from a standardized, nationally normed test or a test normed against a sample representative of the state public school population in 1992 or later. As part of Mississippi’s appeals process described above, a student must take a substitute evaluation to receive a diploma, but the state policy does not mention specific tests that could serve as substitute evaluations. In June, Florida approved legislation that allows scores on other exams including the SAT, PSAT, ACT, PLAN, the College Placement Test, and military entrance exams to be
substituted for FCAT results. This law will only be in effect for one year. However, after further study by the state, the plan may be made permanent.

There are risks associated with allowing substitute examinations. Critics may ask why states simply do not scrap state testing programs in favor of existing tests that many students already take, such as the SAT or the ACT. While doing so might save some expense, states would also lose an instrument that is aligned to state standards.

**State-developed Alternate Assessments**

In 2002, we reported that New Jersey has a Special Review Assessment (SRA) process for 12th graders who have met all graduation requirements but have not passed the regular state exit exam. In 2003, New Jersey was the only state surveyed to report that it had an alternate assessment system for regular education students—in other words, those who are not in special education. The state may discontinue this option, however, due to concerns that it is not rigorous enough and provides a “free pass” to students. The state education commissioner has recommended terminating this program beginning with the Class of 2008 (Mooney & McCarron, 2003). Instead, the state proposes to award students who fail the state exam with a “certificate of attainment” in place of a diploma. The state would also provide students with more and earlier remediation, including special summer academies for students who do poorly on the state’s 8th grade exam, which takes place well before the start of exit exam testing in 11th grade. This plan had not yet been approved by the time this report went to press.

**Alternate Administration of Exit Exams**

At least one state, Ohio, provides an alternate administration of the state’s exit exam for certain regular education students. In Ohio, qualified students may have an oral administration of the tests for graduation, except for the writing test. To qualify, a student must be a second-semester senior, have taken and failed the test before, and either have a grade point average of 2.5 or better out of 4.0 or be identified as an English language learner.

**Coursework and Exams from Other States**

In at least two states, students who have moved into the state from another state may use out-of-state course credits to be exempted from the requirement to pass specific end-of-course exit exams. In Maryland, which is phasing in a system of end-of-course exit examinations, a student who previously received credit in another state for a course for which Maryland has an end-of-course exam does not have to take the exit exam in that subject. In Mississippi, which introduced end-of-course exams in school year 2002-03, students who transfer into a Mississippi school from out of state may be exempted from passing the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) if they have earned sufficient Carnegie Units in the course tested.

A few states also waive the graduation requirements for students to pass the state’s exam, or sections of the exam, if they passed an exit exam in another state. In
Alaska and New Mexico students can ask for this type of waiver if they passed an exam in another state.

Specific reciprocity agreements between states to accept each other’s exit exam results are very rare. Maryland and Ohio had such a reciprocity agreement, but both are phasing out the previous exit exams to which it applied. For the time being, however, a student who passes the Maryland Functional Testing Program exams in mathematics and/or citizenship and then moves to Ohio would receive credit on Ohio’s 9th Grade Proficiency Tests for the test area(s) passed, and vice versa.

Certificates and District Diplomas

Our 2003 survey indicates that 16 states provide, or intend to provide, regular education students who do not pass exit exams after multiple tries with a district diploma, a pre-GED skills certificate, or a certificate of achievement, attendance, or completion. These states include Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, all of which already have exit exams, and Alaska, Arizona, Utah and Washington, which are phasing in a graduation requirement for an existing test. New Jersey is considering a similar option.

These programs are meant to provide some form of recognition to students who have completed all high school graduation requirements except for passing the exit examination. These programs may also motivate students to continue to take the exam after leaving high school in states where this is an option, or may serve as a pathway to a job-training or other type of postsecondary program. There is no research about the benefits to students of these multi-tiered systems, nor is there evidence about whether students with a second-tier credential earn as much after graduation as students with a GED, for example, or how their achievement in job-training or community college programs compares with that of other students. This type of research would be useful, however, given the common use of this policy option.

Addressing the Needs of Special Student Populations

One of the most complex challenges facing states is to determine equitable ways to include students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) in their testing systems. During school year 2002-03, these issues were often in the forefront of state policy debates about exit exams.

Students with Disabilities

States continue to grapple with effective ways to include students with disabilities in exam systems to the extent possible, while recognizing their special needs. A persistent tension exists between wanting to hold all students to the same high expectations and being realistic about what some students can accomplish. As noted by the independent research group HumRRO in its third yearly evaluation of California’s CAHSEE test, the continuing low pass rates for students with disabilities suggest that some students may take a very long time to master the standards and
perhaps won’t ever master them (Wise et al., 2003). The report recommended that state policymakers “engage in a continued discussion about reasonable options for students with disabilities who may not ever be likely to pass the test” (p. v).

All states allow students with disabilities to use certain accommodations when taking exit exams, though the list of allowable accommodations varies across states. Accommodations refer to alterations in testing conditions, intended to remove irrelevant barriers to performance and allow the student to demonstrate his or her true capabilities (National Research Council, 1997). For example, a blind student cannot take a test that is normally administered in printed form unless an accommodation is available to have the test presented orally or in Braille. (For more information about which accommodations are allowed in each state, see the state high school test profiles on the Standards for Success website at www.s4s.org).

In response to an open-ended question in our 2003 state survey, many states reported that they award students with disabilities an alternative certificate of completion or achievement instead of a regular diploma if they pass all graduation requirements except the exit exam. Some states reported that they allow students with disabilities to take alternative assessments as a way to earn a regular diploma. New Jersey, for instance, does not offer any alternate certificates but does allow students with severe disabilities to demonstrate their competence through the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA), which includes student work samples, instructional data, and other information related to important skills selected from the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). The State Profiles at the end of this report provide more detailed information about each state’s exit exam policies for students with disabilities.

Over the past year, states have continued to take steps to address growing complaints that exit exams requirements are unfair for many students with disabilities. Massachusetts has approved a new accommodation for students with disabilities—a computer-based assistive reading device that reads test questions aloud, enabling special needs students to take the test on a computer rather than having teachers read the questions to them. The device, which is already used during instruction for students with specific reading and learning disabilities, is intended to provide students with a better opportunity to fully demonstrate what they know and can do.

In a more controversial move, the Massachusetts House and Senate voted to allow students with disabilities who have repeatedly failed the exam to get a regular diploma (Kelin & Kurtz, 2003). Some students with disabilities who did not pass the test and their parents applauded the idea. Other advocates for students with disabilities viewed the proposal as a negative trend that would absolve schools from responsibility for effectively preparing these students to meet state standards. Massachusetts Commissioner of Education David Driscoll called the bill counterproductive, noting that more than 70% of the state’s students with special needs have met the graduation standards, up from just 30% in 2001—an accomplishment he said would not have happened if educators had not held students with disabilities to the same standard as their peers (Olson, 2003). Some observers expressed concern that if the amendment was enacted, it could bring repercussions from the federal government, because NCLB requires nearly all special education students to participate in state accountability tests. Some also feared that students who fail the MCAS will be labeled as disabled and identified for special education services only
as a means to exempt them from the graduation requirement (Rothstein, 2003, May 8). In July, the governor vetoed the amendment, and the legislature did not attempt to override the veto.

Florida has been wrestling with similar issues. In January 2003, Florida’s Education Board agreed to expand the list of acceptable testing accommodations for students with disabilities to include additional changes in test presentation, response format, scheduling, and use of assistive devices, as long as these accommodations would not jeopardize the validity of test results. A few months later, Florida passed a law allowing a waiver of the FCAT requirement for students whose disabilities render them unable to take the exit exam. The new legislation allows disabled students who have successfully completed specific graduation requirements but failed to pass the FCAT after taking it in both 10th and 11th grades to receive a diploma if a special education committee determines that the test cannot accurately measure a student’s skills because of his or her disability (Horne, 2003).

English Language Learners

In 2002, we described the variety of accommodations, exemptions, alternate assessments, and tests in other languages available to English language learners. Very little has changed during the past year for ELLs in states with exit examinations. The only major development is that in response to the gap in pass rates between ELLs and the general student population, several states are considering additional supports or waivers for these students. These include recent proposals in Florida and Massachusetts, as described earlier in this chapter.

The State Profiles at the end of this report provide more detail than last year’s report about the options available to help ELLs obtain a regular high school diploma. A few trends not mentioned last year are worth highlighting:

- At least one state (Virginia) allows the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as a substitute test for ELLs.
- In states that exempt ELLs from taking the exit exam if they are newly enrolled, the exemptions range in length. In Texas, ELLs who have been enrolled in the school for less than 12 months are permitted a one-time deferral. In Minnesota, ELLs are exempted if they have been enrolled in a school fewer than three years where the primary language of instruction is English.
- Many states allow ELLs to use dictionaries and electronic language translators as an acceptable accommodation during the exit exam.

Linking Exit Exams with Higher Education

One goal of exit exams is to strengthen the connection between success in high school and adequate preparation for higher education. A common complaint has been that some students breeze through their high school courses and earn a diploma only to find that they are not prepared to handle college-level work (Venezia, Kirst & Antonio, 2003). States are using exit exams, in part, to help ensure that students have the necessary competencies to be successful in college or the workplace.
To what extent are exit exams currently affecting students’ eligibility for higher education? Many universities require that students have a high school diploma to be admitted; at these institutions, students who do not pass the exit exam and consequently do not receive a high school diploma are not eligible for admission, so in an indirect way, these states are using exit exam results for purposes of admission. Some universities accept students without diplomas who have alternative credentials, such as a GED, or have passed the university’s own alternative evaluation. Almost all state community college systems accept students with alternative credentials. Thus, students who do not pass an exit exam may be barred from some, but not all, higher education opportunities.

We surveyed officials from state higher education commissions and admissions officers to find out the extent to which public higher education systems explicitly consider students’ exit exam results when making admissions or course placement decisions. Two states, Alaska and Virginia, reported using exit exam results for making admissions decisions in all of their public universities. In Alabama and New York, exit exam results are considered in the admissions decisions for some public universities and community colleges. Finally, some public community colleges in New Mexico consider exit exam results for admissions decisions. New Mexico, New York and Texas were the only states to report that exit exams results were being used by some of their public universities and community colleges for course placement.

There are signs, however, that public institutions of higher education may pay more attention to students’ exit exam results in the future (Rubin, 2003). In North Carolina, legislation passed in 2001 leaves open the possibility of using the state’s high school graduation test in college admissions. While Pennsylvania does have not a statewide exit exam requirement, the state board of education voted last spring to require schools to include students’ state test scores on their high school transcripts. In Texas, leaders from both K-12 and higher education must set a “college-readiness” score on the state’s exit exam, as a signal that students who earn that score can handle college material (Wertheimer, 2003).

Exit exams have already begun to affect students’ eligibility for federal financial aid. Recently, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige denied Massachusetts’ proposal to allow students who have passed all graduation requirements except the exit exam and have received a certificate of attainment instead of a diploma to tap into more than $80 billion in need-based federal aid. The Massachusetts certificate of attainment was created to help students who fail the MCAS gain access to certain postsecondary opportunities, including community college, job training, the military, and training programs offered by state trade licensing organizations. To be eligible for the certificate, students must take the exit exam at least three times, participate in tutoring, and, beginning with the class of 2004, maintain an attendance record of at least 90%. For many students who have earned this certificate, the availability of financial aid could make the difference between attending postsecondary education or training or not attending at all (Rothstein, 2003, April 24). At the suggestion of the U.S. Department of Education, the state is tracking some students who have received the certificate and are attending community college to gauge whether their achievement is comparable to that of students with a high school diploma. If the state finds that these students have an acceptable success rate, it will probably resubmit its request to the Education Department in the next few years (Keynes, 2003, May 1). Meanwhile, federal department officials stressed that students
Without high school diplomas can still become eligible for federal student aid by passing the GED or an approved “ability to benefit in college” test (Walsh, 2003).

Many postsecondary officials, as well as some testing experts and others, are wary of using state exit exams for college admissions purposes, since the tests were not designed to predict the likelihood of students succeeding in college and may not be valid for that purpose. As described in the 2003 report from Stanford University’s Bridge Project, Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations, K-12 standards and tests have been developed with scant participation by postsecondary educators (Venezia et al., 2003). Exit exams usually stress different knowledge and skills than college entrance and placement exams. The RAND researchers who helped with this study found that in math, for instance, state exit exams are more likely to include open-ended questions and problems that are framed within realistic contexts than are college admissions or placement exams. The college exams were found to assess intermediate algebra and trigonometry to a greater extent than state exit exams. In writing, few college admissions or placement tests require students to produce a writing sample, whereas the majority of state exit exams do. Until recently, there has been little effort to bridge expectations for high school graduation and college entry so that exit exams could be developed that would be valid for both purposes.

The Standards for Success (S4S) project, a joint research project of the University of Oregon and Stanford University, seeks to answer two questions: what must students know and be able to do to succeed in entry-level university courses, and how can universities make better use of state high school assessments in their application decisions? In spring 2003, S4S released a set of standards for university success. These standards are the product of a two-year study by the S4S research group in which more than 400 faculty and staff members from 20 research universities identified what students must do to succeed in entry-level courses at their institutions (see www.S4S.org). The researchers assert that these statements represent the most comprehensive and thoroughly grounded set of standards for college success yet developed.

The standards for each subject area section begin with “knowledge and skills foundations”—general principles about such issues as study skills and general approaches to coping with college work. The foundations are followed by more specific expectations in each subject area. In the area of writing, for example, students are expected to not only apply conventions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling, but also be able to persuade the reader by anticipating and addressing counterarguments, use rhetorical devices, and develop an accurate and expressive style of communication that moves beyond mechanics to add flair and elegance to writing.

Ultimately, these standards are intended to influence the kinds of competencies that get tested on high school exit exams so that in the future, exit exam results will better inform college admissions officers about whether high school graduates are ready for college-level work. The project has already captured the interest of the College Board, best known for sponsoring the SAT, the nation’s most widely used college admissions exam. The College Board plans to use the standards for university success to make future changes to the SAT, with the goal of making the new version of the SAT a better gauge of not only whether students have mastered knowledge and skills at the high school level, but also whether they are prepared to succeed at the university level (Cavanagh, 2003).

A few research efforts are underway to build such a bridge. The American Diploma Project being conducted by ACHIEVE, Inc. and the Standards for Success project, a collaboration among researchers from the University of Oregon and Stanford University and sponsored by the Association of American Universities, are both aimed at improving alignment between K–12 standards and expectations for college entry. A goal of these projects is to develop aligned standards that could serve as a basis for developing future high school assessments that would be more useful in the college admissions process. Box 6 describes the Standards for Success Project and its early results. Projects like these raise the question, however, of whether the standards to graduate from high school should be the same as those needed to enter college, given that not all high school graduates are college bound.

In summary, states continue to struggle with such issues as developing options for students who have not passed exit exams, ensuring students have an adequate opportunity to learn the content of exit exams, determining appropriate expectations and assistance for English language learners and students with disabilities, and dealing with legal challenges to these tests. In addition, states face the challenges of coordinating exit exam policies with broader educational reforms like NCLB and with other educational institutions such as higher education. States seem to have made progress with these issues, but as political and public pressure increases, the challenges may become even tougher.
State Profiles
Alabama
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition
Subjects Tested: Reading, Language, Mathematics, and Science
Initial Grade Tested: 11th
Test Type: Standards-based

Alabama has been administering the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 3rd edition since 1999. The first edition was introduced in 1983 and the second edition in 1993. Diplomas were first withheld in 1985 for students who took but did not pass the first edition, in 1995 for the second edition, and in 2001 for students who took but did not pass the third edition. The AHSGE is administered in September, December, March, and July for students in the 11th grade.

The state considers the AHSGE to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 11th grade standards. The state plans to use the final retake of the exam to meet the high school testing requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The AHSGE tests reading, language, mathematics, and science. The classes of 2004 and beyond will also be required to pass social studies. There are about 100 questions for each subject area tested, except for reading, which has 84. The test questions are all multiple choice. There are no time limits for completing the subtests, and all students are allowed to use calculators on the math section of the exam.

Scoring/Reporting
On a scale of 0-999, students must achieve a scaled score of 563 in reading, 560 in language, 477 in mathematics, 491 in science, and 509 in social studies to pass the exam. Proficiency and advanced levels will be established to correspond with the scaled scores. The results are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents three weeks after testing occurs and once a year in August to the public. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions or responses are released after administration.

Options for Students

General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted four opportunities to retake the exam by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is the summer after 11th grade. There are no alternate diplomas for general education students who do not pass the exit exam, but students can seek a GED in lieu of a diploma. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states that allows students transferring into schools in Alabama to substitute scores from other state assessments for the AHSGE.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities are allowed to use state-approved accommodations while testing related to scheduling, setting, format, equipment, and presentation. These students can also receive a graduation certificate or Alabama Occupational Diploma if they do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma.
**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use state approved accommodations while testing related to scheduling, setting, format, equipment, and recording.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam and often incur 100% of the cost. Students, however, are not required to attend.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to teach test taking skills, interpret test results, and become familiar with the content of the state exam. In addition to the training and professional development listed above, the state has developed lesson plans for preparing students for the tests and information guides explaining the test. Study guides have been developed for students to use in preparation for the exam.

**Alabama Higher Education Policies**

Some of the public universities and community colleges 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.

**Pass Rates for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam 3rd Edition**

**CUMULATIVE PASS RATES BY THE END OF GRADE 11 IN SCHOOL YEAR 2001-02**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CUMULATIVE PASS RATES BY THE END OF GRADE 12 IN SCHOOL YEAR 2001-02**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>Cumulative Pass Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Lunch</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Alaska High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam
Subjects Tested: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10th
Test Type: Minimum Competency (Essential Skills)

Alaska has administered the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (AHSGQE) since March 2000; the class of 2004 will be the first required to pass the exam to receive a diploma. Students first take the exam in the spring of 10th grade.

The state considers the AHSGQE to be a measure of minimum competency (essential skills) that is aligned with 10th grade standards. The state plans to use this exam to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The high school exit exam tests reading, writing, and mathematics. In the most recent administration, there were 52 math, 40 reading, and 40 writing questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, and extended response questions. There are no time limits for completing the subtests, and only students with disabilities who have a state approved Optional Assessment program required by the student’s IEP that designates the use of calculators are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees score the open-ended questions on the exam. On a scale of 100-600, students must achieve a scaled score of 322 in reading, 275 in writing, and 328 in mathematics to pass. Students fall into either the proficient or not proficient levels. Assessment results are reported to districts, schools, students, parents, and the public about two months after testing occurs. Students receive individual result reports on subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they achieved a proficient or not proficient rating. None of the test questions or responses are released after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
Students who do not pass the exam the first time are permitted two opportunities to retake the test for each year they remain in school. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is at the next administration of the exam. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma for students who do not pass the exit exam, but students can receive a certificate of achievement. The State Board of Education & Early Development is in the process of promulgating a regulation that waives students from the exam requirement if they arrive in the state too late in their high school careers to take the exam; if they experience “rare or unusual circumstances” that prevent them from taking the exam; or if they pass another state’s exam required for a high school diploma.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities have four options for taking state-required examinations:
1. Take the assessments under the same conditions as non-disabled students.
2. Take the assessments with accommodations.
3. Take an Optional Assessment.
4. Take an Alternate Assessment (a portfolio or other type of special examination for students with severe cognitive disabilities only; this is the only option that does not lead to a high school diploma).
Under options 1 and 2 above, students with disabilities take the high school exam under regular test administration procedures except that under option 2, students may receive accommodations if required by their IEPs or section 504 plans under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Test accommodations are listed in Table 1 of the Participation Guidelines for Students in Alaska State Assessments.

Optional Assessments are available to students with disabilities who have taken but not passed any or all of the AHSGQE tests. Optional Assessments must be required by the students’ IEP or section 504 teams, must be approved by the department, and cannot be changed after February 1 of their junior year. Optional Assessments are regular administrations of the AHSGQE except that special changes to test administration procedures are allowed, such as the use of a four-function calculator or help understanding test questions.

**English Language Learners**
The math questions can be read to English language learners in their native language.

**Support Policies**
The state provides Quality Schools Grants through the public school foundation program that can be used, among other things, to identify and provide services to low performing students.

The state provides training for teachers on how to interpret results and has developed information guides explaining the test.

**Alaska Higher Education Policies**
The public universities in Alaska use the AHSGQE for admissions decisions and for awarding scholarships. However, the state does not have a community college system. Rather, the community colleges are branches of the university system. Students can be admitted into public universities and community colleges if they do not receive a diploma because they did not pass the AHSGQE but met all the other graduation requirements.

**Pass Rates for the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Arizona
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards
Subjects Tested: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10th
Test Type: Standards-based

Arizona began administering the Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) in 1999. In order to allow time for the AIMS test to be aligned with curricula and to give students the opportunity to learn the material, Arizona will not begin to withhold diplomas until the graduating class of 2006. The writing test is given in February, and the reading and math tests are given in April of the 10th grade.

The state considers the AIMS to be a measure of state standards, and it will eventually be aligned with performance objectives that are not necessarily grade specific. The state plans to use the first administration of the exam to meet the high school testing requirement in the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
Students are assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics. There are about 45 questions for each subject area tested. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, writing prompt/essay, and extended/performance task questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. Students are not allowed to use calculators on the math section of the exam.

Scoring/Reporting
Scorers with college degrees who are hired by the testing company score the open-ended questions on the exam. On a scale that ranges from 200-800, students must achieve a scaled score of 500 in reading, 500 in writing, and 500 in mathematics in order to pass. The achievement levels are: exceeds the standard, meets the standard, approaches the standard, and falls below the standard. The results are reported to districts and schools 35 working days after tests are scored. Districts decide when to report scores to the students and parents. Public reporting usually occurs on September 1. Students receive reports of results on subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the test questions are released on the Internet and through other media after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
Currently retest opportunities are on hold for students who have taken the exam but are not required to pass the exam as a graduation requirement. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is in the fall after 10th grade. There are no alternate routes to a diploma for general education students who do not pass the exit exam, but districts can give other types of recognition as long as it doesn’t indicate that the student has graduated without completing the Arizona Board requirements.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations while testing based on their individual strengths. Alternate state diplomas are not available, but students can take an alternate state assessment called AIMS-A.
English Language Learners

ELLS who are eligible for accommodations are allowed:

- To use a translation dictionary, have the exam administered in a separate location or small group, have directions reread, and have the language of the directions simplified while taking the reading and writing sections.

- To receive services from an interpreter, to have test items or students’ short answers translated verbatim into English, to use a translational dictionary, to have directions reread on each page, or to be in a separate room or small group for the math section of the exam.

Support Policies

Information was not provided on policies that prepare students and teachers for test administration and remediation services.

Arizona Higher Education Policies

Public universities and community colleges in Arizona do not use the AIMS tests in admissions, scholarship, or course placement decisions. Students can also be admitted to public universities and community colleges if they do not receive a diploma because they did not pass the state exam but meet all the other graduation requirements.

Pass Rates for the Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards

PASS RATES FOR ALL 10TH GRADE STUDENTS WHO TOOK THE AIMS IN 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
California
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: California High School Exit Exam
Subjects Tested: English/language arts and Mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 10th
Test Type: Standards-based

California has been administering the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) since the 2000-01 school year. The original legislation required students in the classes of 2004 and beyond to pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a high school diploma. Based on results of a study released May 2003, however, the State Board of Education decided in July 2003 to delay the consequences of the high school exit exam until 2006. The examination is administered every other month, July through May, and districts choose three testing dates per academic year, with testing dates being four months apart. Grade 10 students may only take the test once in the latter part of the year.

The California Department of Education (CDE) considers the CAHSEE to be a standards-based exam. The English/language art section is aligned to 9th and 10th grade standards, and the mathematics section is aligned to 6th through 8th grade standards, which include Algebra I. The state is using the grade 10 census administration of this exam to meet the high school assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The CAHSEE tests English/language arts and mathematics. In the most recent edition of the exam, there are 80 multiple choice questions on the mathematics section and 82 multiple choice questions and two writing tasks on the English/language arts section. The English/language arts part of the test is given over two days. The suggested time for each day is 120 minutes. The mathematics part of the test is given on one day and the suggested time is 120 minutes. Students may request more time to complete the test as long as appropriate arrangements are made at the school level. Students whose IEP or section 504 plan specifies that they may have accommodations may use the accommodations, including calculators, when taking the exam.

Scoring/Reporting
The CDE’s testing contractor has an online scoring system for the written essays. The contractor has an application process that is open to anyone with a college degree. Teachers, especially California teachers, are encouraged to apply. Prospective scorers are trained to apply the scoring criteria for the CAHSEE and then successfully complete a certification test. Scorers are also certified daily during the online scoring session. Students are assigned either a pass or fail for the exam.

On a scale that ranges from 250 to 450, students must score 60% or 350 in English/language arts and 55% or 350 in math. The testing contractor sends student results to the district within 10 weeks of test administration. School districts in turn send the results to schools, and schools send the results to students and parents under no definitive timeline. Public reporting of results is done annually in October. Student reports of results include subject area scale scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether the student passed or failed. A sample of test questions and responses to writing tasks is released annually to schools, teachers, and students, is posted on the website, and is mailed to school districts. The CDE is preparing student study guides for English/language arts and math that contain released questions.
Options for Students

General Education
In 2002-03, school districts chose three test dates per year (out of July, September, November, January, March, and May) to administer the exam. Grade 10 students were to take the exam only in the March or May administrations. Grade 11 students could have up to three opportunities to retake one or both portions of the exam. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma or alternate diplomas for students who do not pass the CAHSEE. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities
California Education Code section 60850(g) states, “Individuals with exceptional needs shall be administered the examination with appropriate accommodations where necessary.” Education Code section 60850(f)(1) defines an accommodation as “any variation in the assessment environment or process that does not fundamentally alter what the test measures or affect the comparability of scores. ‘Accommodations’ may include variations in scheduling, setting, aids, equipment, and presentation format.” Section 60850(f)(5) defines a modification as “any variation in the assessment environment or process that fundamentally alters what the test measures or affects the comparability of scores.”

Students with an IEP or section 504 plan must be allowed to take the test with accommodations listed in their IEP or plan. The state regulations specify a process for districts to ask the CDE whether a proposed variation in testing is either an accommodation or modification (section 1218). Additionally, the CDE has published a matrix, approved by the State Board of Education, of commonly used accommodations and modifications.

If a student takes the CAHSEE with a modification and receives the equivalent to a passing score (350 or higher) on one or both parts of the exam, the score report will be marked not valid because of the use of the modification. The local school district governing board can, however, waive the requirement of successful passage of the CAHSEE. The parent or guardian must request that the school principal submit a waiver request to the school district governing board. The governing board may waive this requirement if the principal certifies that the student has all of the following:

“(1) An individualized education program adopted pursuant to the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.) or a plan adopted pursuant to section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794(a)) in place that requires the accommodations or modifications to be provided to the pupil when taking the high school exit examination.

(2) Sufficient high school level coursework either satisfactorily completed or in progress in a high school level curriculum sufficient to have attained the skills and knowledge otherwise needed to pass the high school exit examination.

(3) An individual score report for the pupil showing that the pupil has received the equivalent of a passing score on the high school exit examination while using a modification that fundamentally alters what the high school exit examination measures as determined by the State Board of Education.” (Education Code Section 60851(c)(1)-(3))

English Language Learners
English language learners who regularly use accommodations in the classroom may also use the same accommodations while taking the CAHSEE. These include additional time, simplified test directions, testing individually or in small groups, and testing in a study carrel or enclosure. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma for ELLs.
Support Policies

The state provides funding for summer school instructional programs for students in grades 7-12 who do not demonstrate sufficient progress towards passing the exam. Summer school may also be offered to students who were enrolled in grade 12 during the prior school year after the completion of grade 12. Students, however, are not required to attend. Additionally, Education Code Section 60853 requires that:

“(a) In order to prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination, a school district shall use regularly available resources and any available supplemental remedial resources, including, but not limited to, funds available for programs established by Chapter 320 of the Statutes of 1998, Chapter 811 of the Statutes of 1997, Chapter 743 of the Statutes of 1998, and funds available for other similar supplemental remedial programs.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that a school district consider restructuring its academic offerings reducing the electives available to any pupil who has not demonstrated the skills necessary to succeed on the exit examination, so that the pupil can be provided supplemental instruction during the regularly scheduled academic year.

(c) A school district should prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination. In preparing pupils to succeed, school districts are encouraged to use existing resources to ensure that all pupils succeed. The state has created programs such as the Class Size Reduction Program, staff development programs, after-school programs, and others, in addition to providing general purpose funding, in order to assist school districts in providing an education that will help all pupils succeed.”

The CDE has developed and distributed teacher guides for English/language arts and for mathematics to provide comprehensive information to assist teachers in preparing their students for the exam. The state also provides annual training on the use of the teacher guides.

California Higher Education Policies

Public universities and community colleges in California do not use the CAHSEE in admissions, scholarship, or course placement decisions. Students can be admitted to public community colleges without a high school diploma. It is also possible for students who do not receive a diploma to be admitted to the public university through a “special action admissions process.” The University of California has recently established a new path to eligibility called the “Eligibility in the Local Context.” Under this path, students are eligible to attend the university if they place within the top 4% of their respective class.
## Pass Rates for the California High School Exit Exam

**MARCH AND MAY 2001 AND MARCH AND MAY 2002 CUMULATIVE PASS RATES FOR THE CLASS OF 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/Language Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities¹</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Students with disabilities who took the test with modifications are not reported in these percentages.

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
Florida High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test  
**Subjects Tested:** Reading and Mathematics  
**Initial Grade Tested:** 10th  
**Test Type:** Standards-based

Florida began administering the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in 1998. The FCAT became a graduation requirement for 10th graders in 2001, with diplomas withheld for the first time for students graduating in 2003 who did not pass the test. Prior to the FCAT, the state administered the High School Competency Test. The exams are administered in March of the 10th grade.

The state considers the FCAT to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 10th grade standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

The FCAT tests reading and mathematics. In the most recent version of the FCAT, there were 50 math questions and 45 reading questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, extended response and mathematics gridded response questions. Both the reading and math subtests are timed at 150 minutes each. Students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Hired scorers with college degrees grade the open-ended questions of the exam. On a scale that ranges from 100-500, students must achieve a scale score of 300 in math and 300 in reading in order to pass. The scores determine their achievement level, which ranges from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). These results are reported to the districts, schools, students, parents, and the public two months after testing occurs. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the test questions and responses are released to schools, teachers, students, and parents and posted on the Internet after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**

Students have five opportunities to retest by the end of grade 12 if they fail the first time they take the exam. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is October of the following school year. At this time, there are no alternate routes to a regular diploma, but students in the graduating class of 2003 may be allowed to substitute another exam for the FCAT. The procedures to implement this option are currently not in place, but will be in the near future. Students can also receive a certificate of completion if they do not pass the exit exam. The state has no reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.
**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities (excluding students with 504 plans) can request to demonstrate knowledge of skills tested with the FCAT through alternate methods. Students with disabilities can also receive a special diploma based on credits or a certificate of completion in some districts. For students at the lower cognitive functioning level, an IEP can determine if they qualify for a Sunshine State Standards Special Diploma.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations and can exercise the same options that are available to all students.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state provides Supplemental Academic Instruction dollars through the Florida Education Funding Program that can be used for remediation services. The amount varies by district, as does the use of the dollars.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results and the content of the state high school exit exam, and it has developed information guides explaining the tests. The state has also developed computer-based programs and study guides for students.

**Florida Higher Education Policies**

Colleges and universities in Florida do not use the FCAT for admission, scholarship, or course placement decisions. Students can be admitted to limited non-degree programs and GED prep courses in community colleges if they do not receive a diploma as a result of not passing the FCAT.

**Pass Rates for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners/LEP²</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Includes a small number of retained students

2 Only students with less than one year of ESOL services

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
The Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) became a graduation requirement in 1994. Students who entered 9th grade between July 1991 and July 1993 were required to pass the English/language arts, mathematics, and writing tests to be eligible to receive a diploma. Science and social studies were phased in over the next two years. Students who entered 9th grade after July 1, 1994, are required to pass all portions of the Georgia High School Graduation Tests, including writing. Prior to the GHSGT, the state administered the Basic Skills Test, which was a minimum competency exam. The writing test is administered in the fall of the 11th grade, and the other content tests are administered in the spring of the 11th grade.

The state considers the GHSGT to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 11th grade standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Georgia is also developing a series of end-of-course exams that were originally intended to replace the GHSGT but, as a result of a June 2003 decision by the state board of education, will now be used as diagnostic tests instead of a graduation requirement.

Test Characteristics
The GHSGT tests English/language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. In the most recent version of the GHSGT, there were 70 math, 60 English/language arts, 1 writing, 90 social studies, and 80 science questions. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. The math, English/language arts, social studies, and science tests are each 180 minutes in length, and the writing is 90 minutes in length. Students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees score the open-ended questions of the exam. On a scale that ranges from 400-600, students must achieve a scale score of 500 in each subject area tested in order to pass. The scores determine their achievement levels, which include pass plus, pass, and fail. Students can either pass or fail the writing section. These results are reported to the districts, schools, students, parents, and the public one month after testing occurs. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. The test questions and responses are not released after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
Students have four opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade if they fail the first time they take the exam. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is the summer after the spring administration. Students can apply for a waiver of the test requirement or receive a certificate of completion or certificate of attendance if they do not pass the exit exam. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.
Students with Disabilities
Students who have accommodations documented in their IEP or in a section 504 plan are allowed to use them while testing. Students with disabilities who are enrolled in special education classes and not seeking a regular education diploma may complete their program and be awarded a special education diploma. They can also apply for a waiver of the GHSGT.

English Language Learners
A LEP/test participation committee can recommend accommodations for English language learners. ELLs are also eligible for the same options as general education students.

Support Policies
School districts are not required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state does not provide funding for remediation services.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results and how to teach the content of the state high school exit exam, and it has developed information guides explaining the tests. The state has also developed study guides for students.

Georgia Higher Education Policies
Public universities in Georgia do not use the GHSGT for admission, scholarship, or course placement decisions. However, students who fail the exam (and receive a certificate of performance) and then get a GED may be admitted to a two-year college in the University System. Only a limited number of these students may be admitted. In addition, if a student who does not pass the graduation test shows exceptional promise for success (through SAT scores, for example), he or she may be admitted as a Presidential Exception at any University System of Georgia institution.

Pass Rates for the Georgia High School Graduation Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/ Lang. Arts</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Since 1997, Indiana has been administering the Graduation Qualifying Exam, which is part of the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+) program. School year 1999-2000 was the first year that diplomas were withheld from students who did not pass the exam. The exams are administered in September and March of the 10th grade.

The state considers the Graduation Qualifying Exam to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with end of grade 9 standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The exam tests English/language arts and mathematics. In the most recent version, there were 57 math questions and 79 English/language arts questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The math section is timed at 162 minutes, and the English/language arts section is timed at 203 minutes. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees with college degrees score the open-ended questions of the exam. There are currently two levels of achievement, pass and did not pass. In 2004, there will be three levels: pass+, pass, and did not pass. The English/language arts exam is scored on a scale of 300-800, and students must score a 466 in order to pass. Math exams are scored on a scale of 300-720, and students must score a 486 in order to pass. These results are reported to the districts, schools, students, parents, and the public two months after testing occurs. Student reports of results include open-ended individual items, subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the questions and responses for the exam are released to schools, teachers, and students and posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students

General Education
Students have four opportunities to retest by the end of grade 12 if they fail the first time they take the exam. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is fall of the following school year. Students can apply for waivers in lieu of passing the exam. The state does not issue alternate diplomas or certificates for general education students who do not pass the exam. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities
Students whose IEPs or section 504 plans so specify may use accommodations. Students who are in the alternate assessment system (non-diploma track in IEP), as determined by the student’s case conference committee, can receive an alternate certificate.
English Language Learners
English Language Learners are allowed to use accommodations pertaining to setting and time.

Support Policies
School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. However, students are not required to attend. The state provides $11 million per year for remediation services. This is approximately 67% of the remediation costs, and the district provides the remaining 33%.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results, what content the state high school exit exam covers, the standards assessed, and the rubrics used in scoring. The state has also developed information guides explaining the tests.

Indiana Higher Education Policies

Public Universities
The public universities do not use the Graduation Qualifying Exam scores other than to see that the student has passed the exam. A student can be admitted to most public universities with a GED or if he or she has received a waiver from the high school exempting him or her from the exam.

Community Colleges
The community colleges do not use the Graduation Qualifying Exam scores other than to see whether the student has passed or not. Students without a high school diploma can attend the community colleges under their Ability to Benefit program, which allows students to enroll under the condition that they will complete a high school equivalency program within one year.

Pass Rates for the Graduation Qualifying Exam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/Language Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Louisiana began administering the Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century (GEE 21) in the 2000-01 school year. Prior to that, the state administered the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE) from 1989 until 2000-01. This year, 2003, will be the first year that diplomas are withheld for students taking the GEE 21. The exams are administered in spring of the 10th and 11th grades.

The state considers the GEE 21 to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 9th to 12th grade cluster standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The high school exit exam tests English/language arts and mathematics in the 10th grade and science and social studies in the 11th grade. In the most recent version of the GEE 21, there were 64 math, 45 English/language arts, 45 science, and 64 social studies questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, writing prompt/essay, and extended/performance task questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are allowed to use calculators on two of the three parts of the math exam. Students approved to use accommodations are allowed to use calculators on all three parts of the math exam.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees and hired scorers with college degrees score the open-ended questions in the GEE 21. On a scale of 100-500, students must achieve a scaled score of 286 in math, 270 in English/language arts, 267 in science, and 275 in social studies. The achievement levels are: advanced, mastery, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory. Students must meet or exceed the approaching basic level in order to pass. These results are reported to the districts, schools, students, parents and the public eight weeks after testing occurs. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the test questions and responses are released to schools, teachers, and students and posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students

General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted four opportunities to retake the English/language arts and mathematics section and two opportunities to retake the science and social studies section by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest is July after the test is administered. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma or alternate diplomas for students who do not pass the exit exam. Students who are 16 years or older can opt out of a regular high school diploma track and are eligible to enter a pre-GED skills certificate program. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities can use test accommodations that are used in the classroom and on assessments as indicated on the student’s IEP, IAP and Verification of Section 504 form. There are no exclu-
sions or waivers for students with disabilities. These students can take an alternate exam and receive a certificate of achievement or use the pre-GED option that is available to all students.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations that they use in their regular instructional and assessment programs. ELLs are also allowed the same pre-GED certificate option available to all students.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass. However, students are not required to attend. Districts often incur 25% of the remediation costs, with the state paying an estimated 75%. The percentage of money provided by the state varies by district. In the 2001-02 school year, the state committed $3 million for remediation services for students who did not pass the high school exit exam.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results, the content of the state exam, and the scoring rubric used for constructed response items. The state has developed curriculum guides based on the exam, lesson plans for preparing students for the tests, and information guides explaining the test. For students, after-school and weekend tutorials and computer-based programs are available.

**Louisiana Higher Education Policies**

**Public Community Colleges**

The public community colleges in Louisiana do not use the GEE 21 for admissions, awarding scholarships, or course placements. Students can be admitted into the public community colleges if they pass an alternate test given by the community college.

**Public Universities**

The Louisiana State schools, University of Louisiana schools, and Southern Universities do not use the GEE 21 scores in their admission, scholarship, and course placement decisions, although Nicholls State University would possibly use them in scholarship decisions. Most universities indicated that students could be admitted with a GED.

**Pass Rates for the Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/ Language Arts</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
Maryland High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Maryland High School Assessments
**Subjects Tested:** English I, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, and Government
**Initial Grade Tested:** Varies
**Test Type:** End-of-course

Maryland began administering the Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) in the 2001-02 school year; however, it has not been determined when the state will begin to withhold diplomas from students who do not pass these exams. The original date for which graduation diplomas were to be withheld was 2007, but in late May 2003, the State Board of Education voted to make the class of 2008 the first group possible to be required to pass the exams in order to graduate. The exams are administered in January or May of the year students complete the course. The state is currently phasing out the Maryland Functional Tests, which are minimum competency tests in reading, writing, and mathematics.

The state considers the HSA to be end-of-course exams that are aligned to course content. The state does not plan to use the HSA to meet the assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

The Maryland High School Assessments test English I, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology and Government. The tests consist of multiple choice, short answer, writing prompt/essay, and extended/performance task questions. Students are given a specified amount of time to complete the tests and all students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Testing company employees score the open-ended questions on the exams. The achievement levels and passing scores will be determined in summer 2003. When passing the tests becomes a graduation requirement, the results will be reported nine weeks after the administration. The format in which scores will be reported has not been determined yet. There are several forms of the test administered in each administration; one test form is posted on the State Department of Education website after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**
If students do not pass an exam they must complete a remediation program before they are allowed to retake the exam. The number of times they can retest has not yet been determined. If a student has received credit in a course for which there is an end-of-course exam prior to transferring to a Maryland public school, he or she does not have to take the exit exam in that subject.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students can use accommodations if they are identified in their IEPs or section 504 plans. Maryland also offers an alternate assessment.

**English Language Learners**
Accommodations can be used if they are identified in the student’s IEP.
Support Policies
Local school systems are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the HSA, and students are required to attend.

The state provides training for teachers on the content of the HSA and has also developed information guides explaining the test. The state has yet to develop preparation and remediation programs and materials for students.

Maryland Higher Education Policies

Public Community Colleges
Maryland community colleges do not plan to use the HSA for admissions, scholarship, or course placement decisions. Some of the community colleges will not admit students who do not have a high school diploma and others will admit students without a diploma.

Public Universities
Neither of the University of Maryland branches at College Park or Eastern Shore has determined yet how it will use the HSA scores, but College Park officials said they are “thinking down the road it may be useful as one factor to consider.” Students cannot be admitted to the universities without a diploma or GED. University of Baltimore, which is a transfer-only institution, and the University of Maryland-University College do not plan to use these scores.

Pass Rates for the Maryland High School Assessments
Pass rates are not yet available.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Massachusetts
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
Subjects Tested: English/language arts and Math
Initial Grade Tested: 10th
Test Type: Standards-based

Massachusetts began administering the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in 1998; however, it did not count as a graduation requirement until the 2001 administration. Diplomas were withheld for the first time for the graduating class of 2003. The exams are administered in April/May and December of the 10th grade.

The state considers the MCAS to be a standards-based exam that is aligned to grade 10 standards. The state plans to use the first administration of the exam to meet the high school testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The MCAS tests English/language arts and mathematics. In the most recent version of the test there were 42 math and 41 English/language arts questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The math test is 60 minutes per session for a total of 180 minutes, and the English/language arts section is 45 minutes per session for a total of 225 minutes, but students may have additional time if necessary. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees score the open-ended questions of the exam. The achievement levels are: advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. Students must achieve at the “needs improvement” level in order to pass each section. The results are reported to the districts, schools, students, parents, and the public about four months after testing occurs. Student reports of results include individual reports on subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the test questions and responses are distributed to districts and schools and posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are provided four opportunities to retake the exam by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest is December after the initial administration. Students who meet specific performance requirements can request a performance appeal in lieu of passing the exam. Districts may also offer certificates of attainment to students who do not pass the exit exam but meet all local requirements and other state-established criteria. The state awards certificates of completion and certificates of attendance. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations that are documented in their IEP and are consistent with those used during routine instruction. Students with disabilities that prevent them from taking the standard MCAS can take an MCAS Alternate Assessment that is in portfolio format. Students meeting the eligibility requirements may also be considered for a performance appeal. If students do not pass the MCAS, they can receive alternate certificates.
**English Language Learners**

ELLS may use an approved bilingual word-to-word dictionary on the MCAS test. ELLs who meet eligibility requirements can also apply for performance appeals.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the MCAS, but students do not have to attend. The state fully funds remediation costs for students who do not pass the MCAS. For the class of 2003, the state spent $12 million in FY 2002 and $3.6 million in FY 2003. In FY 2002 and FY 2003, $5 million was spent each year in the form of competitive grants specifically targeted to the class of 2003.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to teach test-taking skills, interpret test results, and become familiar with the content of the MCAS. The state has developed after-school tutorial programs, weekend tutorial programs, and computer-based programs for students.

**Massachusetts Higher Education Policies**

Public universities in Massachusetts do not use the MCAS for admissions, scholarship or course placement decisions.

**Pass Rates for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/Language Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>Cumulative Pass Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Minnesota High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Basic Skills Test  
Subjects Tested: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics  
Initial Grade Tested: 8th and 10th  
Test Type: Minimum Competency

Minnesota has been administering the Basic Skills Test (BST) in math and reading since 1996 and in writing since 1999. In 1996 districts had the option of using the BST or a norm-referenced test, but in 1998 the BST became mandatory. The graduating class of 2000 was the first class for which diplomas were withheld. The exams are administered in reading and math in grade 8 and in writing in grade 10.

The state considers the BST to be a minimum competency exam that is not aligned to state standards. The state does not plan to use this exam to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics

The high school exit exam tests reading, math, and writing. In the most recent version of the BST, there were 68 math, 40 reading, and 1 writing prompt questions. The math and reading sections included additional field questions that were not reported. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting

On a scale that tops off at 750 for reading and 780 for math, students must score 75% or 600 in both reading and math. In writing, the holistic passing score is 3 on a scale of 0-4. There are no set achievement levels for the BST. The results are reported to the districts, schools, and the public about seven weeks after testing occurs. Schools release student reports on their own schedule. Student reports of results include subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area and whether they pass or fail. Test questions and responses are not released each year.

Options for Students

General Education

If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted 11 opportunities to retake the exam by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest is July after the initial administration. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma at the state level, but districts may establish alternate routes. There are also no alternate diplomas for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities

Minnesota's testing guidelines for students with IEPs or 504 plans require that students with disabilities be included in the diploma tests (BSTs), and allow the use of accommodations in the areas of setting, scheduling, presentation format, and response while testing. Alternate assessments and exemptions are based on the student's IEP or 504 plan and the recommendations of the IEP team. Students with an IEP or a 504 plan may have the test modified to meet the specifications of the plan. Passing scores for special education and students with 504 plans may also be lowered.
**English Language Learners**

Minnesota’s testing guidelines for students with limited English proficiency (LEP) require ELLs to be included in the BSTs, and accommodations are permitted in the areas of setting, scheduling, presentation format, translations, and response format. ELLs are exempted if they have been enrolled in a school fewer than three years where the primary language of instruction is English. Translated mathematics tests in a bilingual form and translated writing prompts in translated-only forms are available.

**Support Policies**

The state does not fund remediation services for students who do not pass the high school exit exam. School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for these students and incur 100% of the cost. Students, however, are not required to attend.

The state has not established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the BST. The state, however, has developed information guides explaining the test and practice tests for teachers. The state has not developed test preparation or remediation programs and materials for students.

**Minnesota Higher Education Policies**

Public universities and colleges in Minnesota do not use the BST for admission, scholarship, or course placement decisions. If students do not receive a diploma because they have not passed 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 into public universities as an exception to the normal requirements by meeting other rigid criteria for college admissions.

**Pass Rates for the Basic Skills Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New to school since Oct. 1</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cumulative Pass Rates by the End of 12th Grade in 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Percent Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>99.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Mississippi began administering the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) in school year 1999-2000. Students are assessed in Algebra I, Biology I, English II (with a writing component), and U.S. History from 1877.

Students who began 9th grade in school year 1999-2000 (anticipated graduation in 2003) must pass the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) plus the subject area test in U.S. History from 1877.

Students who began 9th grade in school year 2000-01 (anticipated graduation in 2004) must pass the mathematics section of the FLE plus the subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877 and English II (with a writing component).

Students who began 9th grade in 2001-02 (anticipated graduation in 2005) must pass the mathematics section of the FLE plus the subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II (with a writing component), and Biology I.

Students who began 9th grade in 2002-03 (anticipated graduation in 2006 or later) must pass the subject area tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II (with a writing component), Biology I, and Algebra I. This group of students must pass all four subject area tests even if they take the course(s) prior to their 9th grade year.

The state considers the SATP to be an end-of-course exam that is aligned with course content. Students take the exams the year they complete coursework. This year, 2003, will be the first year that diplomas are withheld for students who do not pass the applicable exam(s). The state plans to use the Algebra I and English II tests to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act; however, the Biology test will not be used to meet the science requirement.

**Test Characteristics**

In the most recent version of the SATP there were 65 Algebra, 85 English II (writing assessment: 1 narrative and 1 informative prompt), 87 biology, and 87 U.S. History questions. The tests consist of multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are required to use graphing calculators on the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Open-ended questions and the English II writing assessments are scored at the testing vendor’s scoring center by trained employees using the Mississippi rubric. On a scale of 100-500, students must achieve a scaled score of 300 on each subject area test in order to pass. These results are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents approximately two months after testing occurs. The results are released to the public yearly during the end of the summer. The individual student reports contain the scale score the student earned, the Pass/Fail status, the number of points correct out of the total and the percent correct for each assessment strand. Only the English II writing prompts and the papers of students who failed the exam are released after every administration.
Options for Students

General Education
If students do not pass a test on the first administration, they are provided three opportunities per year to retake the test. Beginning with the 2003-04 school year, seniors who plan to graduate in May 2004 will be given up to five opportunities per school year to retake the subject area tests. In some cases, alternate assessments are given to students who qualify. Students can also receive a certificate of completion. Students from another state who transfer into a school in Mississippi can be exempt from taking a subject area test if they have earned Carnegie Units in the course tested.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities (who have a current ruling and IEP), including temporary physical disabilities, are allowed the use of accommodations while testing.

English Language Learners
English language learners who have been certified as eligible by a screening team are allowed to use accommodations while testing.

Support Policies
The state, districts, and schools have provided training and remediation (intervention) guides to assist in the remediation process. School districts are encouraged to provide remediation services for students, but students are not required to attend.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to teach test taking skills, interpret test results, and become familiar with the content of the state exam, and every teacher who teaches a subject area receives a practice test on CD-ROM. The state has also developed Teacher Guides, Student/Parent Information Guides, and a website with resources for students, parents, and district personnel.

Mississippi Higher Education Policies
The SATP is not used for admissions, scholarships, or course placement decisions at public universities and community colleges in Mississippi. Students can be admitted to a public community college if they have a GED. However, students cannot be admitted into public universities without a diploma.

Pass Rates for the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program
Pass rates are not yet available.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Nevada High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Nevada High School Proficiency Examination
Subjects Tested: Math, Reading, Writing Prompts, and Science
Initial Grade Tested: 10th
Test Type: Standards-based

Nevada began administering the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE) in spring of 2001. Prior to the HSPE, the state administered a minimum competency state exit exam. The graduating class of 2003 is the first graduating class to have diplomas withheld if students do not pass the HSPE. The exams are administered in spring of the 10th grade.

The state considers the HSPE to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 8-12th grade standards. The state plans to use the exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, but it is still negotiating with the U.S. Department of Education to determine which administration will be used for NCLB accountability.

Test Characteristics
The HSPE tests mathematics, reading, writing, and science. In the most recent version of the HSPE there were 60 math, 54 reading, 2 writing prompts, and 60 science questions. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. The tests are timed at 90 minutes, but the state allows students an indefinite amount of time to complete the exam if they need it. Students whose IEPs indicate they can use calculators are allowed to do so in the math section of the exam.

Scoring/Reporting
The achievement levels are: exceeds standard, meets standard, approaching standard, and developing/emergent. The range of scale scores for each subject tested is 100-500. Standard-setting committees use a book-marking procedure to recommend passing scores. Passings scores are set at 290 for the 2003 school year and will be gradually raised to 300.

Test results are reported to the districts 28 days after test administration. Districts are required to report results to schools and parents within 15 days of receipt from the testing contractor. Scores are released to the public by districts after the schools receive them. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions and responses are released after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted six opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is April of the following year. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma if students do not pass the exam, but they can receive certificates of completion, certificates of attendance, or an exempt diploma for students with IEPs. The state has not formed reciprocity agreements with other states concerning the use of assessment scores from other states in place of the HSPE.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities can use state-approved accommodations. They can also receive a diploma that indicates that they are exempt from taking the HSPE.
**English Language Learners**

English language learners are given the Language Assessment Scales test and must score at level III or above in oral language and reading and above level II in writing to be able to take the HSPE. If they score below the required levels, they can take an alternate assessment. To obtain a regular diploma, these students must pass the HSPE.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the HSPE. Students, however, are not required to attend. The state fully funds remediation services provided for students who do not pass, but a dollar amount was not available.

The state provides training for teachers on how to interpret test results and has developed information guides explaining the test. The state has also developed study guides for students.

**Nevada Higher Education Policies**

Public universities and community colleges in Nevada use the HSPE in admissions decisions and to award the statewide Nevada Millennium Scholarship. However, the exam is not used for course placement. If students do not receive a diploma but meet all other graduation requirements, they can still be admitted into public universities and community colleges.

**Pass Rates for the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 504 Plan</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
New Jersey
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: High School Proficiency Assessment
Subjects Tested: Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics
Initial Grade Tested: 11th
Test Type: Standards-based

New Jersey began administering the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) in March of 2002. Prior to the HSPA, the state administered the Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11). The graduating class of 2003 is the first year that diplomas are withheld from students who do not pass the entire exam. The HSPA is administered for the first time in March of the 11th grade.

The state considers the HSPA to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 11th grade Core Curriculum Content Standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The HSPA tests language arts literacy and mathematics. In the most recent version of the HSPA there were 48 math and 50 language arts literacy questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, and writing prompt/essay questions. The math is timed at 2 hours and 40 minutes; language arts literacy is administered over a two-day period. Testing is 2 hours 25 minutes on day I and 2 hours 55 minutes on day II. All students must have calculators for the math test.

Scoring/Reporting
Hired scorers with college degrees grade the open-ended questions and the writing tasks of the assessment. The achievement levels are advanced proficient, proficient, and partially proficient. Students must achieve at the proficient level in order to pass. On a scale of 100-300, students must achieve a scaled score of 200 in each test section in order to pass. Students who score 100-199 are partially proficient, 200-249 is proficient, and students who score from 250-300 are considered advanced proficient. These results are reported to the district and schools three months after testing occurs, and students, parents, and the public receive scores within 30 days after the results are reported to the district. Student reports of results include subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area and whether they pass or fail. Some of the written responses are released to schools, teachers, and students after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted two opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is October of their senior year. Students also have the option to go through the Special Review Assessment (SRA), which allows them to demonstrate proficiency via Performance Assessment Tasks (PATs). The PATs are untimed assessments, which are administered after targeted instruction in the deficient skill areas. There are no alternate diplomas for students who do not pass the exit exam or go through the SRA process. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding substitution of scores for the HSPA.

Students with Disabilities
A wide range of accommodations and modifications is available for special education students or students with section 504 plans. Accommodations must be specified in the student’s IEP or section 504 plan. Accommodations or modifications may be in setting, scheduling, timing, test procedures, or administration of Braille and large-print test versions.
The Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) is a portfolio assessment for students whose disabilities are so severe that they are exempt from taking the HSPA. The APA measures the student’s achievement of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and/or the Core Curriculum Content Standards for Students with severe disabilities in language arts literacy and mathematics. The APA includes student work samples, instructional data, and other information related to targeted skills selected from the goals and objectives in the student’s IEP. There are no special diplomas for students with disabilities if they do not pass the exam.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners may be tested with one or more of the following accommodations in the test administration procedures:

1) Additional time not to exceed 150% of the regular testing time for each test section;
2) Translation of the directions into the student’s native language; and
3) Use of a bilingual dictionary.

English language learners may also participate in the SRA process in order to obtain a regular high school diploma. The SRA process may be done in the student’s native language, English, or both languages. At this time, the HSPA is given in English only.

**Support Policies**

The state does not fully fund remediation services for students who do not pass the high school exit exam. The state, however, provides funds for the 30 Abbott school districts (high-poverty districts) to provide remediation services. School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for these students and often incur the majority of the remediation cost. Students are expected to participate in remedial classes, which may be held before, during, or after school, on Saturday, or in the summer.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results, and in the past has provided training to help teachers become familiar with the content of the HSPA. The state has also developed information guides explaining the test. For students, the state has produced study guides.

**New Jersey Higher Education Policies**

The HSPA is not used for admission, scholarship, or course placement decisions in public universities and community colleges in New Jersey; however, students cannot graduate from high school in New Jersey if they do not pass all required test sections. Students may take courses in public community colleges if they do not receive a high school diploma but they will not be admitted as matriculated students if they do not meet all high school graduation requirements including passing the HSPA.

**Pass Rate for the High School Proficiency Assessment**

**PASS RATES FOR FIRST TIME TEST-TAKERS IN SCHOOL YEAR 2001-02**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Language Arts Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific Islander</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
New Mexico High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** New Mexico High School Competency Examination  
**Subjects Tested:** Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Composition  
**Initial Grade Tested:** 10th  
**Test Type:** Minimum Competency

New Mexico has been administering the New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) since school year 1987-88. Students graduating in 1990 were the first to be denied a state diploma if they did not pass the exit exam. The exams are administered in November and January of the 10th grade.

The state considers its high school exit exam to be a minimum competency exam that is currently not aligned with state standards. As such, the state does not plan to use this assessment to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**
The high school exit exam tests reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and composition. There are about 30 questions for each section except for composition, which has only one. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer, writing/prompt, and extended/performance questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests, but students generally take an hour to complete them. All students are allowed to use calculators on one part of the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**
Testing company employees score the open-ended assessment questions. Students are assigned a pass or fail depending on whether they achieve a scaled score of 175 each in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. In writing, students must score a 3 on a scale of 0 to 6. The results are reported to the districts and schools two months after testing occurs. The district then decides when to release scores to students, parents, and the public. Student reports of results include individual test items, subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions and responses are released after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted four opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade and 10 additional opportunities over a five-year period after leaving grade 12. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is in the fall of the following year. With the approval of the local board of education, the school can also initiate a waiver request to the state citing compelling reasons for granting a diploma despite the student not passing all subtests in the exit exam. Students can also receive a certificate of completion in lieu of a state-issued diploma, if all other requirements are met. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams, but students can request to waive passing the NMHSCE if they passed an exam in another state.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations while testing that include presentation, response, setting, and timing and scheduling of the assessment. These students can all be assessed
using alternative assessments for which the state has two: the Career Readiness program, which is aligned to State Board of Education’s Career Readiness Program standards and benchmarks as defined in the student’s IEP, and the Ability Program, which is based on the IEP goals established for the student. Students with disabilities can also receive a certificate of completion if they do not pass the state high school exit exam.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations while testing that include presentation, response, setting, and timing and scheduling of the assessment. ELLs are also allowed the same options as described for all students.

**Support Policies**

The state provides no funding for remediation services for students who do not pass the NMHSCE, and school districts are not required to provide remediation services for these students. If the district chooses to provide these services, it must incur 100% of the cost.

The state has not established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the NMHSCE, nor has it developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for these exams for students’ use.

**New Mexico Higher Education Policies**

**Public Universities**

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 the scores for course placement, and others do not.

**Community Colleges**

Most community colleges do not use the scores for admissions; however, they may be used for course placement decisions. All of the community colleges admit students holding a GED and in some cases allow them to take classes for two years while attaining a GED. Some of the community colleges allow students to take classes without a diploma or GED but students would need to have one or the other to receive financial aid or a degree.

**Pass Rates for the New Mexico High School Competency Examination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
New York
High School Exit Exam Profile

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

The New York State Board of Regents approved the new graduation requirements in 1996. Prior to 1996, the state administered Regents exams to students pursuing a Regents endorsed diploma as well as minimum competency exams called the Regents Competency Tests. The class of 2000 was the first graduating class that took the new exams. These students had to pass only the English subject test in order to graduate. The classes of 2003 and beyond have to pass all five Regents examinations. Students take the exams when they complete the courses.

The state considers the Regents Comprehensive Examinations to be end-of-course exams, which are aligned to standards from grades 9-12. The state plans to use the final retest taken by the student to meet the assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
Students are assessed in English, mathematics, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and science. In the most recent version of the exam, there were 35 math, 28 English, 52 global history and geography, and 52 U.S. history and government test questions. Students were required to pass one of four science tests that had either 73, 74, 77, or 78 questions each. The tests consist of multiple choice, short answer, writing/prompt, and extended/performance task questions. The tests are 180 minutes each, with the English test having two parts at 180 minutes each. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section of the exam.

Scoring/Reporting
Teachers score the open-ended assessment questions. The achievement levels are: pass with distinction (85-100), pass (65-84), and low pass (55-64). Students must score a 65 in order to pass. Districts can however, elect to use the low pass score of 55-64 until 2005 for the cohort of students first entering grade 9 in 1999. The results are reported to the districts, schools, students, and parents immediately after the test administration and to the public three months after test administration. Student reports of results include subject area scores and whether they pass or fail. All of the test questions and responses are released to the schools and posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
Students are provided three opportunities each year to retake any required exam. They must pass all five by the end of 12th grade. If students do not pass a required exam, they can retake the exam at the next administration. The state has approved alternate assessments that students can take in lieu of the Regents Exam, such as Advanced Placement tests, Scholastic Aptitude Test II, International Baccalaureate, and the Advanced International Certificate of Education examination. The state, however, does not award alternate diplomas. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding substitution of scores for the Regents exams.
**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations that have been approved by the state and are contained in the state manual. These students can also be assessed using the Alternative Assessment of the Regents Competency Test. The state awards an IEP Diploma for students with disabilities who do not receive regular diplomas.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations while testing that include the use of bilingual dictionaries as well as other presentation, response, setting, and timing and scheduling accommodations. ELLs are also allowed the same options as described for general education students.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required to provide academic intervention services for those students who do not pass the Regents exam. In the 2002-03 school year, the state provided $718 million in extraordinary needs aid, $212 million in operating standards aid, and $66 million in improving pupil performance (to the big five city districts only) that was used for academic intervention services. Although some aid was provided, the state does not fully fund remediation services.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test scores and the content of the Regents exam. The state has also developed curriculum guides based on the exams and information guides explaining the tests. However, the state has not developed any preparation and remediation programs or materials for students.

**New York Higher Education Policies**

Some public universities and community colleges in New York use the Regents Examinations for admissions, scholarships, and course placement decisions. Students can be admitted to public community colleges if they do not receive a diploma but meet other requirements.

### Pass Rates for the Regents Comprehensive Examinations

**PASS RATES FOR 1998 COHORT OF 9TH GRADE STUDENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Global History &amp; Geography</th>
<th>U.S. History and Government</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
North Carolina has been administering the North Carolina High School Competency Test since 1978. The exam consists of the North Carolina High School Competency Tests of Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, and Computer Skills Multiple-Choice and Performance (which was added as a graduation requirement for the class of 2001). Students graduating in 1982 were the first to be denied a state diploma if they did not pass the exam by the end of the 12th grade. The exams are administered in 9th grade.

The state considers the North Carolina High School Competency Test to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 8th grade standards. The state does not plan to use this assessment to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics

The high school exit exam tests reading comprehension, mathematics, and computer skills. There are about 80 math, 68 reading, 70 computer skills multiple choice, and 23 computer skills performance questions on the exams. The tests consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. The math test is approximately 97 minutes, and the reading test is approximately 100 minutes. However, students may have additional time if needed. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test.

Scoring/Reporting

Hired scorers holding college degrees score the open-ended assessment questions. Students are assigned proficiency levels based on their score: level I—limited performance, level II—not yet proficient, level III—proficient, and level IV—exceeds expectations. Students must score at or above level III on both reading comprehension and mathematics. Districts can scan and score the competency tests immediately following administration. School districts are required to report scores resulting from the administration of district-wide and state-mandated tests to students and parents or guardians along with available score interpretation information within 30 days from the generation of scores at the school district level or receipt of the scores and interpretive documents from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions and responses are released after administration. However, some sample questions similar to those used on the test are released every year.

Options for Students

General Education

If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted a maximum of 13 opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade. School systems decide when testing and retesting occurs, but they must offer at least one opportunity yearly. Scores from standardized, nationally-normed tests that are normed on a sample representative of the public school population in 1992 or later may be used for competency screening. Students can receive a certificate of achievement in lieu of a state-issued diploma, if all other requirements are met. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities, other than those who are following the occupational course of study, may apply in writing to be exempted from taking the competency tests. Students with disabilities who are
following the occupational course of study do not have to pass the competency test. Students are allowed to use accommodations while testing if they use the same accommodations during regular class time. These students can be assessed using alternative assessments. Students with disabilities can also receive a certificate of achievement if they do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations that are routinely used in the classroom setting while testing. The North Carolina statewide testing program allows ELLs to use testing accommodations that include testing in a separate room, scheduled extended time, multiple test sessions, test administrator reads test aloud, student marks in test book, and English/Native Language Dictionary/Language Electronic Translator. Other options for ELLs are currently being discussed with internal and external committees.

**Support Policies**

The state provides block grants to districts, and districts have flexibility in how they use the funds. School districts are required to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam but students are not required to attend.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to teach test taking skills, the content of the competency tests, and curriculum documents and intervention strategies. The state has also developed curriculum guides based on the exams and information guides explaining the tests. For students, the state has developed after-school and weekend tutorial programs as well as handouts and test booklets.

**North Carolina Higher Education Policies**

North Carolina’s public universities and community colleges do not use the North Carolina High School Competency Test for admission decisions, scholarships, or 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.

**Pass Rates for the North Carolina High School Competency Test**

The following information is based on 2000–01 data for the graduating class of 2003–04. Since the data has not been disaggregated by subject (mathematics and reading) the information represented in the table is the total percentage passing the entire test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math &amp; Reading Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Groups</th>
<th>Percent Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 These numbers may increase due to additional retest opportunities in SY 2003-04.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Ohio administered the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) in spring 2003 for the first time. Prior to the OGT, the state administered the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests. The graduating class of 2007 will be the first year that diplomas are withheld. The exams are administered in spring of the 10th grade.

The state considers the OGT to be a measure of 10th grade state standards. The state plans to use the first administration of this exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
Students are assessed in reading and mathematics only in 2003 and 2004; three additional test areas (writing, social studies, and science) will be required beginning in 2005. In the most recent version of the OGT there were 43 operational math and 38 operational reading questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer and writing prompt/essay questions. Students may have up to 150 minutes for each test, and all students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Hired scorers with college degrees score the open-ended questions of the assessment. The achievement levels are: advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. The State Board of Education is scheduled to set standards and cut scores for the OGT in reading and mathematics after the March 2004 administration. Test results are reported to the districts two months after testing; districts, in turn, report results to the schools, students, and parents. The public release comes through the statewide local report cards released in August each year. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Test questions and responses for the operational items on the exam will be posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are provided four opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is in summer or October after the test is administered.

Ohio law allows students to meet the testing requirement for earning a diploma by passing four of five graduation tests, provided all of the following criteria are met. Students must have:

1. Scored within 10 points of proficient on the failed test;
2. Attained a 97% attendance rate through all four years of high school without being expelled in last four school years;
3. Attained a grade point average of at least 2.5 out of a 4.0 in the subject area missed and completed the curriculum requirements in the subject area missed;
4. Participated in any intervention programs offered by the school and achieved a 97% attendance rate in any program offered outside the normal school day; and
5. Obtained letters recommending graduation from high school subject area teachers and from the high school principal.

Qualified students may have an alternate (oral) administration of the tests for graduation except for writing. To qualify, a student must be a second-semester senior, have taken and failed the test before, and either have at least a 2.5 grade point average out of 4.0 or be identified as a limited English proficient student.

There are no alternate diplomas for students who do not pass the exit exam.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are allowed the use of accommodations as outlined in the Ohio Administrative code rules. The state plans to provide a protocol for alternate assessments for students with disabilities beginning in 2003-04. While there is no exclusion from participating in the statewide graduation tests by taking the regular assessment or participating in the alternate assessment, students with disabilities whose IEPs so specify can be excluded from having to pass the graduation tests.

**English Language Learners**

The following accommodations are available for those students who are identified as limited English proficient: extended time, use of dictionaries, state-provided translators, and oral administration of tests in all areas except writing.

**Support Policies**

Since diplomas will not be withheld until 2007, there are currently no funds earmarked for remediation services for students who do not pass the OGT. School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass; however, students are not required to attend.

The state is developing a host of professional development materials on teaching test taking skills, interpreting results, familiarizing teachers with the content of the state exit exam and familiarizing teachers with scoring the OGT.

**Ohio Higher Education Policies**

**Public Universities**

The public universities in Ohio have not yet made decisions about how they will use the Ohio Graduation Test scores but most said they have begun such discussions. Most require a diploma for admission, but one accepts students with a GED. One admissions director in a public university indicated that once the results of the tests are available, they may establish policies to do an alternative review process for admissions.

**Community Colleges**

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) and do not plan on using the scores in their admissions processes.

**Pass Rates for the Ohio Graduation Tests**

Since the state just began administering the OGT in 2003, pass rates are not yet available.

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
South Carolina
High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Basic Skills Assessment Program Exit Exam  
**Subjects Tested:** Mathematics, Reading, Writing  
**Initial Grade Tested:** 10th  
**Test Type:** Minimum Competency

South Carolina began administering the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) in 1986. The graduating class of 1990 was the first class for which diplomas were withheld. The BSAP is administered in April for students in grades 10 and 11 and in April, October, and July for students in grade 12.

The state considers the BSAP to be a minimum competency exam that is not aligned with the state standards developed in 2000. The state does not plan to use the BSAP to meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The state will begin phasing in a new exit exam called the High School Assessment Program. This exam is already being used for NCLB accountability, but will not count as a graduation requirement for high school until 2006.

**Test Characteristics**

The BSAP tests mathematics, reading, and writing. In the most recent version of the BSAP, there were 55 math questions, 60 reading questions and 1 writing question. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. Students with modification allowances are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Employees working for the testing company score the open-ended questions on the exam. The achievement levels are: meets standard and does not meet standard. Students must obtain a scaled score of 700 in reading and mathematics and a 3 in writing. The highest possible score for reading and math varies, but the highest possible score for writing is a 4. These results are reported to the districts and the public two months after testing, and the district decides when to report scores to schools, students, and parents. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions or responses are released after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**

If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are provided four opportunities by the end of the 12th grade to retake the exam. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is in the 11th grade. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma if students do not pass the BSAP; however, they may receive certificates of attendance if they do not meet the regular graduation requirements. The state has formed no reciprocity agreements with other states concerning the substitution of other state exams for the BSAP requirement.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities can use accommodations or modifications during testing. Certificates of attendance can also be awarded to students with disabilities if they do not meet the regular graduation requirements.
**English Language Learners**

English language learners can use state-approved accommodations as indicated in the testing manual.

**Support Policies**

The state requires school districts to provide remediation services to students who do not pass the BSAP, and students are required to attend. The state, however, does not fully fund remediation services. The state provides training for teachers on how to interpret test results and familiarize them with the content of the BSAP exit exam. In addition, information guides explaining the tests have also been developed by the state. The state has not developed preparation and remediation programs for students.

**South Carolina Higher Education Policies**

The state public universities and community colleges do not use the BSAP scores in making admissions, scholarships, or course placement decisions. The institutional practices vary for students who do not receive a diploma. Some public universities and some community colleges do not admit students without a diploma or GED.

**Pass Rates for the Basic Skills Assessment Program Exit Exam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.*
Tennessee began administering the Gateway Examinations in the 2001-02 school year. The graduating class of 2005 will be the first year that diplomas are withheld for this exam. Prior to the Gateway Examinations, the state administered the Tennessee Competency Test, which is currently being phased out. The Gateway is administered in various grades depending on the subject.

The state considers the Gateway to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with 10th grade standards. The state plans to use the first administration of the Gateway to meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

The Gateway tests mathematics, science, and language. In the first version of the Gateway, there were 55 questions in each section of the exam. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**

The achievement levels are: advanced, proficient, and below proficient. These results are reported to the districts, schools, students, and parents one to two days after testing and to the public in July. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. None of the test questions or responses are released after administration.

**Options for Students**

*General Education*

If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are permitted three opportunities each year to retake it until the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is at the next administration. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma if students do not pass the Gateway; however, students may receive certificates of attendance if they do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma. The state has formed no reciprocity agreements with other states concerning the substitution of other state exams for the Gateway requirement.

*Students with Disabilities*

Students with disabilities can use accommodations during testing. Students can also take alternate portfolio assessments. If students do not pass the Gateway, they can receive a Special Education diploma.

*English Language Learners*

School districts may determine and document accommodations for ELLs based on the individual needs and abilities of the student.
Support Policies
The state requires school districts to provide remediation services to students who do not pass the Gateway, and students are required to attend. The state provides training to teach teachers how to teach test taking skills, interpret test results, and become familiar with the content of the Gateway exam. In addition, curriculum guides based on the exams, lesson plans for preparing students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests have also been developed by the state. The state has also developed study guides for the students.

Tennessee Higher Education Policies
Public universities and community colleges in Tennessee do not use the Gateway for admission or course placement. Students cannot be admitted to a public university or community college if they do not receive a diploma.

Pass Rates for the Gateway Examinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Texas
High School Exit Exam Profile

Test Name: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
Subjects Tested: Math, English/language arts, Science, and Social Studies
Initial Grade Tested: 11th
Test Type: Standards-based

Texas began administering the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in the 2002-03 school year. The graduating class of 2005 will be the first year that diplomas are withheld for this exam. Before the TAKS, students had to pass either the state-administered Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) or a series of end-of-course exams. Students who were in the 10th grade in the 2001-02 school year and before still have to pass the TAAS or end-of-course exams in order to receive a high school diploma. The TAKS is administered in spring of the 11th grade, and although 11th grade students have to take it this year, it will not count as a graduation requirement for them.

The state considers the TAKS to be a standards-based exam that is aligned with high school subjects. The math section includes at least Algebra I and geometry with the aid of technology. English/language arts must include at least English III and essential knowledge and skills in writing. Social studies must include early American and U. S. history, and science must include at least biology and integrated chemistry and physics. The state does not plan to use the TAKS to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Test Characteristics
The TAKS tests English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. In the first version of the TAKS there were 60 math, 52 English/language arts (including 1 writing essay), 55 science, and 55 social studies questions. The test consists of multiple choice, short answer and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

Scoring/Reporting
Testing company employees and hired scorers with college degrees score the open-ended questions of the assessment. The achievement levels are: met standards and commended performance. Test results are reported to the districts, schools, students, and parents about two and a half weeks after testing and to the public one week after the districts receive the results. Student reports of results include individual reports on individual test items, subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. All questions on the exams are distributed to schools, teachers, and students and posted on the Internet after administration.

Options for Students
General Education
If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they are tentatively permitted five opportunities to retake it by the end of the 12th grade. Their first opportunity to retest after the initial administration is during the summer following their junior year. There are no alternate routes to a regular diploma if students do not pass the TAKS. However, students may receive certificates of completion if they do not pass the exit exam.
Students with Disabilities
Test administration procedures that do not invalidate test results may be used for students with disabilities. The state has guidelines on accommodations that can be used for all students, but additional accommodations not listed in the guidelines can be requested by submitting an Accommodations Request Form to the Accommodation Taskforce of the Student Assessment Division. Students for whom the TAKS has been deemed an inappropriate measure may take a Locally Determined Alternate Assessment that measures the learning of a student receiving special education services. Students with disabilities who fulfill their graduation requirements through the standard method or through their IEP receive a regular high school diploma.

English Language Learners
ELLs with disabilities are afforded the same accommodations as other students with disabilities. Test administrators can give oral instruction in the students’ native language prior to the test and small group administration is permitted. ELLs who have been enrolled in the school for less than 12 months are permitted a one-time deferral from taking the TAKS, but must take subsequent exit exams until they pass.

Support Policies
The state requires school districts to provide remediation services to students who do not pass the TAKS, but students are not required to attend. The state provides information guides that explain the TAKS for teachers’ use.

Texas Higher Education Policies
Public universities and community colleges in Texas do not use the TAKS for admission or scholarship decisions. However, some public universities and community colleges use it for course placement. Students can be admitted provisionally to a public community college if they do not receive a diploma but meet all other graduation requirements.

Pass Rates for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
Pass rates are not yet available.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Utah
High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Utah Basic Skills Competency Test
**Subjects Tested:** Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
**Initial Grade Tested:** 10th
**Test Type:** Minimum Competency

Utah will begin administering the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test in February of 2004. This will be the state’s first high school exit exam. The exam has been piloted but will not be a graduation requirement until 2006. The exam will be administered in the 10th grade.

The state considers its exam to be a minimum competency exam that is aligned to a cluster of standards for grades 6-9. The state does not plan to use this exit exam to meet the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

Students are assessed in reading, writing, and mathematics. In the most recent version of the exit exam that was piloted, there were 70 math, 63 reading, and 31 writing questions. The test consists of multiple choice and writing prompt/essay questions. There is no time limit for completing the subtests. All students are allowed to use calculators on the math section.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Testing company employees score the open-ended assessment questions. Cut scores have not been determined yet. The achievement levels will range from 1-4. Results will be reported to the district, schools, students, parents, and the public three months after testing occurs. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. The state plans to post some of the questions and/or responses on the Internet after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**

If students do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration, they will be provided four opportunities to retake the section by the end of the 12th grade. After 12th grade, they can go through an adult education program to retest. The first opportunity to retake the exam after the initial administration will be in October. There will be no alternate routes to a regular diploma for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state will, however, issue certificates of completion and certificates of attendance to those students who do not pass.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations. The state allows various types of accommodations as needed by the student. Students who do not pass the exam can also receive an alternate completion diploma.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations, but there are no alternate routes to a regular diploma for these students. They can, however, exercise the options available to all students.
Support Policies
Since the exam has not been administered yet, except in pilot situations, many of the support policies have not been decided. This information is forthcoming.

Utah Higher Education Policies

Public Universities
The public universities in Utah have not yet determined policies regarding the use of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test.

Community Colleges
The community colleges in Utah have not determined how or if they will use the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test scores in their decision-making processes.

Pass Rates for the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test
Pass rates are not yet available.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Virginia
High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Standards of Learning End of Course Exams

**Subjects Tested:** English: Writing, English: Reading Literature and Research, Math, History/Social Studies, and/or Science

**Initial Grade Tested:** Varies

**Test Type:** End-of-course

Virginia has been administering the Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course exams since 1998. Students in the 9th grade class of 2000-01 (graduating class of 2004) are the first students to be required to meet the SOL testing requirements to be eligible for a standard or advanced studies diploma. Students take the SOL tests when they complete corresponding coursework. The state is also phasing out the Literacy Passport Test, which was the previous high school exit exam.

The state considers the SOL tests to be end-of-course exams, and they are aligned with subject content. The state plans to use students’ scores on their first attempt of the SOL exams to meet the high school testing requirement in the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

To meet the requirements for a standard diploma, students in the graduating classes of 2004 through 2006 must accrue six verified credits: two in English and four others in subject areas chosen by the student. To attain a verified credit, a student must pass the class and the associated SOL end-of-course test. Students in the graduating classes of 2007 and beyond will be required to have two verified credits in English as well as one verified credit each in math, history/social studies, and science, and one in an area of their own choosing to be eligible for a standard diploma. There are 42 multiple choice operational items on the English: Reading Literature and Research test and 30 operational and 1 direct writing prompt (with 24 possible points) for English: Writing. There is no time limit for completing the tests. All students are allowed to use graphing calculators on the end-of-course mathematics tests.

**Scoring/Reporting**

On a scale of 0-600, students must achieve a scaled score of 400 (proficient) in order to pass. The proficiency levels are: advanced, proficient, and fails/does not meet the standard (below proficient). The results of the multiple choice end-of-course tests, except for writing, are reported to districts, schools, students, and parents less than one month after testing, and state-level data are reported to the public about three months after testing. Trained readers with college degrees score the short paper that students write as a part of the writing test. The results of the writing test are reported to the district, schools, and students about two months after testing. Student reports of results include individual test items, subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail. Some of the test questions and responses are posted on the Internet after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**

If students do not pass an end-of-course test on the first administration, they are provided at least three opportunities each year to retake the exam. Students who fail an end-of-course test 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. Students may also use substitute tests to meet the verified credit requirements. For English: Writing and/or English: Reading Literature and Research, substitutions include such exams as the AP English Language Composition, IB English, SAT Writing, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Advanced Placement International English Language (APIEL), Cambridge International Examinations, and ACT. For Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry, substitute assessments include CLEP College Algebra, IB Math Studies, IB Math Methods, IB Mathematics, SAT II Math IC, SAT II Math IIC, AP Calculus, Cambridge International Examinations,
and ACT. Students who meet specific criteria can also be awarded verified credit locally in the areas of science and history/social studies. The districts can also award certificates of completion for students who do not qualify for a diploma. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states regarding the high school exit exams.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations approved by the IEP team or section 504 committee. These students are afforded all of the options available to general education students. In addition, certain students who cannot be accommodated on the regular SOL assessments can take a portfolio assessment called the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP). Students with disabilities can also pursue a modified standard diploma that requires them to complete course work and pass literacy and numeracy tests or pursue a special diploma, which is available to students with disabilities who complete the requirements of their IEP but do not meet the requirements for other diplomas.

**English Language Learners**

English language learners are allowed to use accommodations approved by the school-based committee. ELLs can use the options for all education students as well as the TOEFL as a substitute test.

**Support Policies**

School districts are required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. Students, however, are not required to attend.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to teach the content addressed in the Standards of Learning, how to interpret test results, and how to use the test results to inform instruction. In addition to the training and professional development listed above, the state has developed curriculum guides based on the Standards of Learning, lesson plans for preparing students on the content, and information guides explaining the test. Computer-based programs consisting of practice tests with feedback on answers for reading and writing have also been developed for students to use in preparation for the exams.

**Virginia Higher Education Policies**

**Public Universities**

All public universities in Virginia use the SOL for admissions. Some public universities also use the SOL to award scholarships.

**Public Community Colleges**

Public community colleges in Virginia do not use the SOL for admissions. Students can be admitted into public community colleges without receiving a diploma from high school as long as they meet other entrance requirements.

**Pass Rates for the Standards of Learning End of Course Exams**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>English: Reading</th>
<th>English: Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners/LEP</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.
Washington High School Exit Exam Profile

**Test Name:** Washington Assessment of Student Learning  
**Subjects Tested:** Mathematics, English/language arts  
**Initial Grade Tested:** 10th  
**Test Type:** Standards-based

Washington has been administering the Grade 10 Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) since 2001. Diplomas will not be withheld until 2008 for students who do not pass. The WASL is administered in late April/early May of the 10th grade.

The state considers the WASL to be a measure of 10th grade state standards. The state plans to use the first administration of the exam to meet the high school testing requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act.

**Test Characteristics**

Students are assessed in English/language arts and mathematics. There are 47 math questions and 42 English/language arts questions including 2 written essays. The test questions include multiple choice, short answers, writing prompts, and extended/performance task. There are no time limits for completing the subtests, and all students are allowed to use calculators on half of the math section of the exam.

**Scoring/Reporting**

Testing company employees, teachers, and hired scorers with college degrees score the open-ended questions on the exam. Students must achieve a scaled score of 400 in English/language arts and mathematics and a raw score of 17 in writing. The scale varies from year to year and from subject to subject. Proficiency levels for English/language arts and mathematics range from 1 to 4. Levels I and II are “does not meet standard”, level III is “meets standard”, and level IV is “exceeds standard.” The proficiency levels for writing are: does not meet standard and meets standard.

Preliminary results are reported to districts and schools two and a half months after test administration, and final results are reported three and a half months after test administration. Students and parents generally receive results about one month after the district receives them. The results are available to the public online about three and a half months after the testing period is complete. Student reports of results include subject area scores, subscores (skills and content) under each major subject area, and whether they pass or fail the test as a whole. Some of the test questions and responses are released after administration.

**Options for Students**

**General Education**

There are currently no opportunities for students to retake the WASL if they do not pass a section of the exam on the first administration. Different options are being considered to measure student achievement in addition to the high school exit exam, but there is currently no other measure in place. Students can receive a certificate of completion if they do not pass the high school exit exam but meet all other graduation requirements. The state has no formal reciprocity agreement with other states that allows scores from other state assessments to be substituted for the WASL.
Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are allowed to use state-approved accommodations while testing. These students can also take a portfolio assessment. Certificates of completion can also be awarded to students with disabilities if they do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma, but local school districts decide how these students qualify and are awarded special diplomas.

English Language Learners

English language learners are allowed to use state approved accommodations while testing related to scheduling, timeline, setting, use of a dictionary or thesaurus (in print or electronic form in English, native language or visual format), or use of a reader to read math assessment items verbatim in English.

Support Policies

School districts are not required by the state to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam. The state has not committed any funds toward remediation services yet.

The state provides training for teachers on topics such as how to interpret test results, the content of the state exam, and content standards and classroom assessments. In addition, the state has developed information guides explaining the test.

Washington Higher Education Policies

Currently, there are no policies regarding the use of the WASL for admissions, scholarships, and course placement decisions in Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). However, there is ongoing consideration by the IHEs for the future use of the WASL in admissions, scholarship, and course placement.

Pass Rates for the Washington Assessment of Student Learning

PASS RATES FOR FIRST TIME TEST-TAKERS IN 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English/Language Arts (Reading)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced price lunch</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information verified by and collected from state assessment personnel and higher education officials, June 2003.


Rothstein, K. (2003, May 15). City would have graduated students who flunked MCAS. *Boston Herald*.


The Center on Education Policy would like to acknowledge the following people for their work on this report: Keith Gayler, associate director of the Center, and Naomi Chudowsky, consultant to the Center, for researching and writing this report; Nancy Kober, consultant to the Center, for writing and editing the report; Madlene Hamilton, research associate, for researching and writing the state profiles and providing input into the remainder of the report; Jack Jennings, director, and Diane Stark Rentner, deputy director, for providing advice on the content and format of the report; and Cutting Edge Design for designing the report.

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