Since 2002, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) has been reporting on the implementation of state high school exit exams. In our work, we noticed that states with higher percentages of white students passing exit exams also had higher percentages of black students passing, and vice versa. As displayed in figure 1, we found a significant positive correlation between the pass rates of white students and of black students. We also found the same relationship existed between the pass rates of white students and Latino students, as shown in figure 2. A similar relationship was found between white and Asian students, white and Native American students, all students and English language learners, and all students and students with disabilities in both math and reading/language arts. We do not have comparable data for Arkansas, Minnesota, or New York. North Carolina was excluded from figure 1 because it appeared to be an outlier to this pattern, although it still appears in figure 2.

Furthermore, with few exceptions, states with higher overall pass rates tend to report smaller achievement gaps between student subgroups. The table displays the gaps in math pass rates between white and black students. States with the highest pass rates report gaps as small as 10 percentage points, while states with the lowest pass rates report gaps as large as 25 to 40 percentage points. Gaps are similar in reading/language arts between white and Latino students, as shown in the table. This is also the case for other subgroups in both math and reading/language arts.

There may be several reasons why these relationships exist between pass rates for different groups of students. Schools in states with higher pass rates for both white students and students of color or English language learners may be adequately preparing all students to pass the exit exam. But it could be that some states may have less rigorous exams or lower cut scores, thus allowing more students to achieve a passing score. Since states only report the passing rates of student groups and do not report raw scores, we are unable to identify the actual size of achievement gaps between student subgroups.

The Center on Education Policy will release its next annual report on state high school exit exams in August 2008.

CEP’s 2007 report, State High School Exit Exams: Working to Raise Test Scores, is available free of charge at www.cep-dc.org, along with additional reports on high school exit exams and all other reports published by CEP.
In September 2007, the Center on Education Policy released its sixth annual report on state exit exams. This policy brief, one of a series, highlights a finding from the report, *State High School Exit Exams: Working to Raise Test Scores*. This brief was written by Dalia Zabala, CEP research associate, and Angela Minnici, CEP senior research associate. Rebecca Barns and Nancy Kober, CEP consultants, edited the brief.