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Fewer States Requiring Students To Pass State High School Exit Exams, Study Finds

*More states administering college and career readiness exams and
adopting common assessments*

WASHINGTON, D.C.— December 8, 2011—For the first time in six years, the number of states requiring students to pass high school exit exams to earn a diploma has gone down, according to the tenth annual report on high school exams and other assessments by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). But at the same time, more than half the states are preparing for new assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards and more than one-fourth are offering college and career readiness assessments, the report finds.

Twenty-five states have or plan to implement policies that require students to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma—three fewer states than in 2010, according to the CEP report. An additional six states have or plan to put in place high school exit exams but do not require students to meet a minimum passing standard on those exams to graduate.

During the past 18 months, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee have changed their policies so that students no longer have to pass an exam to receive a diploma. Instead, a student's exit exam score now counts as a percentage of the student's final grade in a course required for graduation. Alabama will also make this change in 2015. "Some states are lowering the stakes attached to their high school exit exams," said Shelby McIntosh, CEP research associate and author of the report, "a trend that could certainly catch on in other states."

The report, which is based on a survey administered to state department of education personnel in the summer of this year, provides an overview of state policies on high school exit exams, college entrance exams (such as the ACT or SAT), and tests of students' readiness for college and a career.

Uncertainty also lies ahead in high school testing policies, as states participating in one of the two consortia that are developing common assessments tied to the Common

Core State Standards decide how adoption of these common assessments might impact current state assessment policies.

Twenty-seven of the 31 states with current or planned exit exams are participating in one or both of these state consortia. Of these 27, at least 16 plan to replace their current exams with consortia assessments. Sixteen states – though not necessarily the same ones – also expect the consortia assessments to be more rigorous than their current assessments.

“States adopting common assessments will undoubtedly make significant changes to their testing systems,” McIntosh added, “but it’s not clear whether they will attach graduation-related requirements to these new assessments.”

The report also notes that in addition to the 31 states that administer an exit exam, 11 states require students to take the ACT or SAT college entrance exam, and 16 states administer, or at least offer to all students, assessments intended to assess students’ readiness for college and/or a career. But although many states are using college and career readiness assessments to determine how well students are being prepared for success after high school, very few colleges and universities actually use these assessments for college admission or placement.

“While the number of states requiring students to pass exit exams to graduate has gone down, testing in high school is actually on the increase, as more states administer other types of exams,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO. “The adoption of the common assessments will be an opportunity to revise all of these policies in a way that makes most sense for all students.”

The report, *State High School Tests: Changes in State Policies and the Impact of the College and Career Readiness Movement*, can be accessed free of charge at www.cep-dc.org. Individual profiles for states with exit exams, college entrance exam policies, and/or college and career readiness assessments are also available for free at www.cep-dc.org.

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.