Since 2002, many states have changed the type of test students must pass to earn a high school diploma. Minimum competency exams are being phased out, comprehensive exams are being used more, and end-of-course exams will soon be widely used. These shifts are occurring as the number of states requiring students to pass an exam to graduate has increased from 18 in 2002, to 22 in 2007, to an expected 26 by 2015. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) defines three types of tests as follows:

- **Minimum competency exams** generally focus on basic skills below the high school level.
- **Comprehensive exams** are aligned with state standards and are generally targeted at the 9th or 10th grade level.
- **End-of-course exams** assess whether students have mastered the content of specific high school courses; these exams are usually standards-based, and students take each test after completing a specific course.

The figure below illustrates this shift, and the table summarizes some of the upcoming changes.

In our 2008 annual report on exit exams, CEP will begin to explore the pros and cons of moving to end-of-course exams, experiences of and lessons learned by states that have moved to end-of-course exams, and the expectations held by states that plan to implement end-of-course exams or a dual testing system (comprehensive exams and end-of-course exams).

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

Our 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 the Center.
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 edited by Rebecca Barns and Nancy Kober, CEP consultants.