

Graduation Exit Exam Matrix

Students are expected to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they will need to continue their education or enter the workforce. With the advent of standards-based reforms, policymakers are turning to performance-based accountability measures for districts, schools, students, and educators. A comprehensive, standards-based education accountability system should establish standards for student knowledge and performance; measure student performance relative to the standards; and hold schools, students, and educators accountable for meeting the standards. One element of an accountability system is an assessment system to measure achievement of standards and one component of an assessment system is a high school graduation exit examination. These exit exams are not the minimum competency tests of the past—they are designed to be aligned to the new content and performance standards states have developed.

All states represented in the matrices are at some stage of implementing a graduation exit exam. The first part of the two-part matrix lists states that require students to pass an exit exam in order to receive a diploma and graduate from high school. The second portion of the matrix includes three states in which there is a waiver process available for students or schools.

For more information, read an NGA *Issue Brief*, [High School Exit Exams: Setting High Expectations](#).

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States With High School Graduation Exit Exams (as of October 15, 2000)

| State and Contact | Name of Test | Implementation Status | Subject(s) | Grade(s) ¹ | Month(s) Offered Every Year | Retakes Permitted/Limit on Number of Retakes | Remediation Required by State/State Funding |
|---|--|---|---|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Alabama Dorothy DeMars 334/242-8038 | High School Basic Skills Exit Exam | Will be phased out by 2003 | Reading, language, math | 11th—all subjects | September, December, March, July | Yes/Yes ² | Yes/Yes |
| | Alabama High School Graduation Exam | Class of 2001 Class of 2002 Class of 2003 | Language, reading Language, reading, math, science Language, reading, math, science, social studies | 10th—all subjects | September, December, March, July | Yes/Yes ³ | Yes/Yes |
| Alaska Richard Smiley 907/465-8691 | High School Graduation Qualifying Examination ⁴ | Spring 2000; class of 2002 | Reading, writing, math | 10th—all subjects | Two times per year | Yes/Yes ⁵ | No/Yes |
| Arizona Dr. Paul Young 602/542-5031 | Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards ⁶ | Spring 2000; class of 2002: reading, writing; class of 2004: math | Reading, writing, algebra, geometry, measurement, data analysis and probability, combined mathematical structure and logic and number sense | 10th | Spring and fall | Yes/No | No/No |
| California John Carey 916/657-4539 | High School Exit Examination | 2000-01: optional for 9th graders; 2001-02: required for 10th graders; 2004-05: required for graduation | Reading, writing, math | 10th | March | Yes/Yes ⁷ | Yes/Yes |
| Delaware Carole White 302/739-2771 | Delaware Student Testing Program | Spring 2000; class of 2002 ⁸ | English/Language arts, math, science, social studies | 10th—English/ language arts, math 11th—Science, social studies | Spring (and fall for retests) | Yes/No | No/No |
| Florida Jim Swingle 850/488-8198 | High School Competency Test ⁹ | October 1983; class of 1985 | Communications, math | 11th | October, January, March, July | Yes/No ¹⁰ | Yes/No |

| State and Contact | Name of Test | Implementation Status | Subject(s) | Grade(s)¹ | Month(s) Offered Every Year | Retakes Permitted/Limit on Number of Retakes | Remediation Required by State/State Funding |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Louisiana Scott Norton 225/342-3406 | Louisiana Educational Assessment Program— Graduation Exit Examination | April 1989; class of 1999 Currently being phased out | Language arts, math, science, social studies, written composition | 10th—language arts, math, written composition 11th—science, social studies | April | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| | Louisiana Educational Assessment Program— Graduation Exit Examination (updated version) | March 2001 and 2002; class of 2003 | English/language arts, math, science, social studies | 10th—English/ language arts, math 11th—science, social studies ¹¹ | March | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| Maryland Mark Moody 410/767-0073 | Functional Testing Program | 1978–1979; class of 1982 Currently being phased out | Reading, math, writing, citizenship | 7th–12th ¹² | October, December, January, February, April, July ¹³ | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| | High School Assessment | January 2004; class of 2007 | English 1, government, algebra, geometry, biology | End of course | January, May | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| Massachusetts Jeff Nellhaus 781/338-3600 | Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) | Spring 2001; class of 2003 | English/language arts, math, science and technology, history and social science, world languages | 10th | May | Yes/No | No/Yes ¹⁴ |
| Minnesota Diane Cirksena 651/582-8759 | Basic Standards Tests | Spring 1996; class of 2000 | Math, reading, written composition | 8th–12th | January, February | Yes/No ¹⁵ | Yes/No |
| Mississippi Jim Simmons 601/359-3052 | Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) ¹⁶ | Fall 1987; class of 1989 | Math, reading, written communication | 11th—all subjects | November, March | Yes/No ¹⁷ | No/No |
| Nevada Tom Klein 775/687-9184 | Nevada High School Proficiency Exam ¹⁸ | April 1998; class of 1999 | Math, reading, writing | 11th—all subjects | October, February, April, June | Yes/No ¹⁹ | Yes/Yes ²⁰ |
| New Jersey Marlene Gourley 609/292-8736 | Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11) | October 1992; class of 1994 | Math, reading, writing | 11th—all subjects | October, April | Yes/No | Yes/No ²¹ |
| | High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) | Language arts literacy & math (2001–02); science (2002–03); social studies (2004–05); visual and performing arts, comprehensive health/physical education, & world languages (postponed) | Language arts literacy, math, science, social studies, visual and performing arts, comprehensive health & physical education, and world languages | 11th—all subjects | March | Yes/No ²² | Yes/No |

| State and Contact | Name of Test | Implementation Status | Subject(s) | Grade(s) | Month(s) Offered Every Year | Retakes Permitted/Limit on Number of Retakes | Remediation Required by State/State Funding |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| New Mexico Cynthia Parsons 505/827-6524 | High School Competency Exam | February 1987; class of 1990 | Language arts, math, reading, science, writing, social studies | 10th—all subjects | November, January, February | Yes ²³ | No/No |
| New York Tom Schoeck 518/474-5902 | Regents Competency Tests | 1987–1988 Currently being phased out | Reading, writing, math, science, social studies (global history), U.S. history and government | 9th or 10th—math, science 10th—global history 11th—reading, writing, global history, U.S. history, government | January, June, August | Yes/No | Yes/Yes ²⁴ |
| | Regents Examinations ²⁵ | June 1999; class of 2005 | English/language arts, global history, U.S. history and government, math, science (life and physical), second language (elected) | 10th—life sciences, math A, global history 11th—English/language arts, U.S. history and government | January, June, August | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| North Carolina Mildred Bazemore 919/715-1191 | North Carolina Competency Tests in Reading and Math | Summer 1994; class of 1998 | Math, reading | 8th ²⁶ | Fall, spring, summer | Yes/No ²⁷ | Yes/No ²⁸ |
| | Essential Skills Exit Exam | Graduating class of 2005 | communications, processing information, problem solving, and using numbers and data. | 11th | Spring (1st time) summer, fall, spring thereafter. | Yes/No ²⁹ | Yes/No |
| Ohio Jan Crandell 614/466-0223 | 9th-Grade Proficiency Tests ³⁰ | Fall 1990; class of 1994 Currently being phased out | Citizenship, math, reading, science, writing | 9th–12th | October, March, May (seniors only), July | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| | High School Graduation Qualifying Exams | March 2003; class of 2005 Currently being phased in | Citizenship, math, reading, science, writing | 10th–12th | March, July, October | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |

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|---|--|---|--|-------------------|---|---|--|
| South Carolina Paul Sandifer 803/734-8295 | Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) | Spring 1986; class of 1990 Currently being phased out | Math, reading, writing | 10th | April, July, October | Yes/Yes ³¹ | Yes/Yes |
| | Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT) | Spring 2003; class of 2005 | Math, reading/language arts, science 2004, and social studies 2005 ³² | 10th | April, July, October | Yes/Yes | Yes/Yes |
| Tennessee Ben Brown 615/532-1651 | Tennessee Competency Test | Currently being phased out ³³ | Language arts, math | 9th—all subjects | October, February, June, July | Yes/No | No/No |
| Texas Ann Smisko 512/463-9087 | Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) ³⁴ | Currently being implemented | Reading, writing, math | 10th—all subjects | October, February, April, July, and May for graduating seniors and out-of-school youth | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| | New assessment per 1999 SB 103 | 2002-2003 | English language arts, math, science, social studies | 11th—all subjects | To be determined | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| Utah Barbara Lawrence 801/538-7810 | 10th Grade Basic Skills Competency Test ³⁵ | Spring; class of 2004 | Language arts, math | 10th | April at end of 10th, April and November in 11th and 12th, and November after graduation. | Yes/No | To be determined |
| Virginia Cameron Harris 804/225-2102 | Literacy Passport Test ³⁶ | Spring 1990; class of 1996 Currently being phased out | Math, reading, writing | 6th | February, July, October (retakes only) | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| | Standards of Learning Tests (SOL) ³⁷ | Spring 1998 Will be implemented effective 2004 ³⁸ | English, math, science, history ³⁹ | End of course | Spring/fall; limited summer administration starting in summer 1999 | Yes/No | Yes/Yes |
| Washington David Anderson 360/664-3512 or Bob Silverman 360/664-0655 | Washington Assessment of Student Learning—10th Grade (WASL 10) | Will be implemented effective 2001 ⁴⁰ | Reading, writing, listening, math, science ⁴¹ | 10th | Spring | Yes/No | Yes/No |

Endnotes

¹ Grade listed is the first grade in which tests are administered.

² Students enrolled in high school are limited to three additional retakes on the High School Basic Skills Exit Exam.

³ Students enrolled in high school are limited to five additional retakes on the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

⁴ Students who fail to pass test will receive a certificate of attendance and have up to three years after leaving high school to change the certificate to a diploma.

⁵ Students are not eligible to take the test three years after their graduation date.

⁶ The school district may provide a certificate other than a diploma, but it will not be recognized by the state.

⁷ Determined by the number of tests offered.

⁸ For the class of 2004, three state high school diplomas will be available: a standard diploma (meets course req., does not pass test), an academic diploma (meets course req., passes test), and a distinguished achievement diploma (meets course req., passes test with honors).

⁹ The Florida Department of Education is in the process of phasing out the High School Competency Test in favor of a new test, The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). This test will be implemented for the class of 2004. Students will be tested on reading, writing, and math.

¹⁰ Students have two opportunities during their junior year and three during their senior year to take the test. If students do not pass the test, they are eligible for a 13th year of instruction or a certificate of completion. Students receiving certificates may retake the test an unlimited number of times to earn a standard diploma.

¹¹ Louisiana is the only state to retain 4th and 8th graders if they do not pass minimum standards test.

¹² The reading, writing, and math tests may be given as early as the seventh grade. The citizenship test is waived for students who complete an approved course in government. Exceptions include students who had already been scheduled in a prior semester to take the citizenship test.

¹³ Reading and math tests are given in October and April. The citizenship test is given in January, February, and April. The writing test is given in December and July.

¹⁴ Currently, remediation is not required under law, but the issue is being discussed. The most recent budget included monies for school districts whose students did not perform well to provide extra assistance if remediation was recommended.

¹⁵ District may elect to offer the test in June.

¹⁶ Beginning in school year 2001–02, plans are to phase out the FLE and replace it with mandatory end-of-course tests in Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History, and English II (with a writing component) to obtain a high school diploma.

¹⁷ Districts are not required to allow individuals take the test after they have been out of school for three years.

¹⁸ If students do not pass the test, they will not receive the standard diploma. However, they will receive a certificate of attendance. Special education students are the only group eligible to waive the exit exam. They will receive diplomas stating that they met all the requirements, except the exit exam.

¹⁹ Students have six opportunities to retake a test or tests not passed before the end of the summer following their senior year. After that, they may continue to take the needed test(s), either through their district's adult education program or a community college, as long as they participate in their district's required remediation program between retakes of the test.

²⁰ Students can begin to take the Nevada High School Proficiency Test in their junior year. Remediation is required for students who fail one or more of the tests and the school provides the class work. State funds are available to assist schools in the remediation process.

²¹ Districts may use federal funds for remediation.

²² Some special education (SE) and some limited English proficient (LEP) students can be waived from taking the exit exam. If a non-exempt SE or LEP student does not pass the test, he/she will not be able to graduate. However, all non-exempt students who fail any test section are eligible to participate in the Special Review Assessment process (SRA) in the senior year. If a student passes the SRA, he/she is eligible to graduate.

²³ State statute provides that students exiting the school system at the end of grade 12 without having passed the state competency exam shall receive a certificate indicating the number of credits earned and the grade completed.

²⁴ School districts have discretion in using state funds.

²⁵ The class of 2005 will be the first class that must pass each of the Regent examinations with a score of 65 or higher to graduate.

²⁶ Students may only take the reading and math tests in the eighth grade. Students retake the tests in the ninth grade and each year thereafter if they do not pass them the first time. The end-of-grade reading and math tests (grade eight) are the first opportunity to screen for the competency requirement.

²⁷ School districts are not required to administer the test(s) to individuals above age twenty-one.

²⁸ Districts may use federal and/or state funds for remediation.

²⁹ If students do not pass the exit exam, they will receive a certificate of achievement, and not a standard diploma. Students are waived from the exam if they are in the occupational course of study (i.e. special education students).

³⁰ In 1997 the state legislature decided to phase out the current 9th-Grade Proficiency Tests and replace them with tests that measure high school proficiency through the end of the 10th grade. The new tests will be a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2005. In spring 2003, sophomores will take the new tests in reading, writing, mathematics, citizenship, and science.

³¹ Students may also take the exam in the summer after their senior year if all other requirements have been completed. Adults may take the test if they are enrolled in an adult education program.

³² A science test will be added to the PACT as a requirement for graduation in spring 2002, and the plans are to add a social studies test as a graduation requirement in spring 2004.

³³ For students entering the 9th grade in 2000–01, the competency tests will be replaced by end-of-course examinations in Algebra I, English II, and biology to meet graduation requirements.

³⁴ Students may meet the graduation requirements by passing state end-of-course tests. In that case, students are not required to take TAAS. Also, local districts have the option of issuing a certificate other than a diploma, but it is not recognized by the state.

³⁵ Students receive a certificate of completion (not a diploma) if they do not pass.

³⁶ If student does not pass, he/she receives a certificate of attendance (not a diploma). Test can be taken any time after graduating to upgrade to diploma. This test will be phased out in 2003.

³⁷ Students may substitute different tests for the SOL exams, including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and SAT-II exams. If student does not pass, he/she receives a certificate of attendance (not a diploma). Test can be taken any time after graduating to upgrade to diploma.

³⁸ The tests are being administered now. However, the graduating class of 2004 will be the first class for which the tests will be used for graduation purposes.

³⁹ From 2004 to 2007, students will have to pass six exams—two in English and four in subjects of their choosing. After 2007, they must pass two tests in English, one in math, one in science, one in social studies, and one in a subject of their choosing (as long as it is in one of the above categories).

⁴⁰ The state board of education determines when WASL 10 is valid and reliable, which triggers the effective date of the Certificate of Mastery as a graduation requirement. Certificate of Mastery is expected to be effective as a state graduation requirement beginning with graduating seniors in 2006.

⁴¹ Social studies, arts, health, and fitness will eventually be included.

States that Allow Waivers Regarding High School Graduation Exit Examinations (as of October 15, 2000)

| State and Contact | Name of Test | Implementation Status | Subject(s) | Grade(s) ¹ | Month(s) Offered Every Year | Retakes Permitted/Limit on Number of Retakes | Remediation Required by State/State Funding |
|---|--|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|--|---|
| Georgia Lynn Tlunkett 404/657-0312 | Georgia High School Graduation Tests ² | Fall 1993; class of 1995 | English, math, science, social studies, writing | 11th—all subjects | Spring, summer, fall, winter | Yes ³ /No | Yes/Yes |
| Indiana Mary Tiede Wilhelmus 317/232-6614 | Indiana Statewide Testing for Education Progress—Plus (ISTEP+) Graduation Qualifying Exam ⁴ | September 1997; class of 2000 | English/language arts, math | 10th ⁵ | September | Yes ⁶ /No | Yes ⁷ /Yes ⁸ |
| Wisconsin John Fortier 608/266-3361 | Wisconsin High School Graduation Test ⁹ | Spring 2002; class of 2004 | English/language arts, math, science, social studies | 11th 12th | Spring, fall | Yes/Yes ¹⁰ | No |

Endnotes

¹ Grade listed is the first grade in which tests are administered.

² Students have the option of undergoing a waiver process if they do not want to take the test to graduate.

³ Students may take the test five times while in high school and an unlimited number of times after their graduation date if they have been unable to pass one or more of the tests. If students have met all other requirements, they receive a certificate of performance or special education diploma after their graduation date until they pass the exam.

⁴ A waiver is available for students who receive a 'C' or above in the courses included in the 22 credits required for graduation. One opportunity for an appeal is available with a recommendation letter and documentation of work (local decision).

⁵ Although it is first administered in the 10th grade, the ISTEP+ tests students to ascertain ninth-grade proficiency in English/language arts and mathematics.

⁶ Currently, retakes are offered once each semester during students' junior and senior years.

⁷ Remediation decisions are made at the local level. Schools must have a remediation plan for students who do not pass the test and may provide preventive remediation to students at any grade who are at risk of not passing the test.

⁸ The state provides remediation/prevention grant monies for each local education agency in which the standards are not met for all tested grade levels (3, 6, 8, and 10), and the local school corporation must have a 1:2 match for state funds. The first class subject to the Graduation Qualifying Exam (2000) also received additional remediation funds through the action of the Governor's office and state budget agency (\$5 million).

⁹ Students are allowed to opt out. Districts can also opt out if they develop their own standards and administer their own test.

¹⁰ Up to four retakes are allowed; students only retake part of test they did not pass.