



Study of State End-of-Course Assessments and Exit Exams



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Introduction

- The Washington State Board of Education (SBE) contracted with Education First Consulting to conduct an independent study of state end-of-course assessments (EOCs).

- The research team was:

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Study Methodology

- First, the team conducted a thorough review of the primary and secondary literature on EOCs and comprehensive tests, as well as the use of these testing formats for exit exams and school accountability.
- Next, we researched and summarized nine states' EOC programs.
 - CA, IN, MD, NJ, NY, SC, TN, TX and VA
- We simultaneously conducted 30 interviews of education, government and business leaders in seven states.
 - CA, IN, NJ, SC, TN, TX and VA
- Finally, we used our research findings to consider policy implications for Washington State's high school assessment system.

Overview of Assessments

- Comprehensive assessments, like the WASL in grades 3-8 and 10, are given to all students in the given grade near the end of the year.
- End-of-course tests (EOCs) are given only to those students who take the corresponding high school course (such as Algebra I). EOCs, therefore, are taken at the same time by students across grades 6-12 (if middle school students are taking the course).
- Both comprehensive tests and EOCs can be adopted "off-the-shelf" and augmented to match state standards, but these are typically lower-quality than tests developed to measure state standards.
- English (reading and writing) tests are generally comprehensive tests; the other subject areas can have end-of-course tests (EOCs).
- States with EOCs in middle/high school nearly always give comprehensive tests in grades 3-8.

Key Findings: Comprehensive Assessments

Overall, we found that states with primarily comprehensive test-based systems:

- Usually focus on 10th grade or lower standards;
- Assess a **slice of high school standards**, rather than deep knowledge of particular subjects;
- Can **potentially narrow** the delivered curriculum to what is tested;
- Provide a "**snapshot**" of system performance;
- Often take up **less testing time** overall and **cost less**;
- Take a **more straightforward** approach to exit exams and school accountability; and
- Rarely provide information on students' readiness for postsecondary education coursework and training.

Key Findings: EOC Assessments

Overall, we found that states with primarily EOC-based testing systems:

- **Vary widely** with respect to number and kinds of courses assessed;
- **Can measure a broader as well as deeper range of standards**, but only if there are a sufficient number of EOCs in each subject;
- **Do not assess all students against common standards**, unless states require all students to take certain courses and/or require all students to take certain EOCs;
- **Can promote more consistency** of teaching and provide more timely information on learning and course quality;
- Motivate students to learn through **exit exams as well as other forms of lesser student stakes** (e.g. counting results in course grades);
- Make it **more complicated to hold schools accountable**, yet offer the potential to produce more validity and reliability; and
- **Can be better-suited for placing students in postsecondary education courses** than comprehensive tests given by states in the 10th grade.

Comparing Assessments

- Comprehensive assessments are more common today than EOCs.
- But more states are shifting to EOCs. As of December 2007:
 - 16 states currently use EOCs
 - 13 additional states are planning to use EOCs

26 States with Exit Exams

17	States currently or planning to use only comprehensive assessments for exit exams: AL, AK, AR*, AZ, CA**, FL, GA, ID, IN*, LA, MN, NV, NM, OH, OR, TX*, WA*
9	States currently or planning to use only EOCs for exit exams: AR (2010), IN (2010), MD (2009), MS (2006), NY (2000), OK (2012), TN (2005), TX (2012), VA (2004)
5	States with comprehensives in some subjects and EOCs in other subjects: MA (English/math 2003; science EOC 2010, U.S. History EOC 2012) NC (reading/math 1982; English, Algebra I, Biology, Civics and economics, and U.S. History EOCs 2010) NJ (English/math 2003; Biology EOC 2010) SC (English/math 2006; Biology and U.S. History EOCs 2012) WA (Reading, writing 2008, Science 2013; Algebra I/Integrated I EOC and Geometry/Integrated 2 EOC 2013)

*Currently has comprehensive assessment, but plans to replace with EOCs

**Some states give EOCs but not for exit exams (e.g. California)

Exit Exams and School Accountability

- All states exclusively using comprehensive assessments for exit exams use them for school accountability under NCLB.
- All states exclusively using EOCs for exit exams use or plan to use them for school accountability under NCLB.
- California's comprehensive 10th grade exit exam also is used for NCLB; its EOCs are used only in the state's more inclusive school accountability index.

Exit Exams for Diagnostic Purposes

- Statewide standardized tests are important for measuring standards, driving curriculum and instruction and ensuring accountability. But they are not diagnostic, per se.
- 13 states with exit exams identify one purpose of the exam as to provide schools with student academic diagnostic information (AL, CA, FL, GA, LA, MD, MA, NV, NJ, NY, TN, and TX).
- Some other commonly-cited purposes for the exams:
 - Determine prospective high school graduates' knowledge and skill levels relative to those needed for entry-level employment
 - Encourage districts and schools to identify and serve students at risk of academic failure
 - Provide data to state policymakers on student attainment of state education goals to inform educational policy decisions
 - Promote equity of opportunity across all student groups

Exit Exam Profile: California

California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

- The CAHSEE has two parts: English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ELA part addresses state content standards through grade ten. The mathematics part of the CAHSEE addresses state standards in grades six and seven and Algebra I.
- The ELA portion has 79 multiple-choice questions and 1 writing prompt.
- The math portion has 92 multiple-choice questions.
- The approximate time allowed to administer the test is 4.5 hours for the ELA portion and 4 hours for the math portion.
- The test is untimed and students can request more time.
- This is a standards-based, comprehensive test that is administered to all students in the 10th grade.
- CA also gives 12 EOCs that are used only for school accountability and curriculum improvement.

Exit Exam Profile: Florida

Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test

- The 10th grade FCAT (a comprehensive test) in reading and math is required as an exit exam. There are three types of items: multiple-choice, gridded-response, and performance.
- The reading exam has 45-50 multiple choice questions and 5 -7 performance tasks (retake exams have only 55-60 multiple-choice questions). The math exam has 30-35 multiple choice questions, 15-20 gridded-response, and 5-8 performance tasks (retake exams have only 25-30 multiple-choice and 25-30 gridded response questions). Both are timed at 160 minutes.
- Students taking the retake test may receive additional time to complete the test. There are currently six retake opportunities; students may retake as many times as they want and can take a "13th" year. SAT or ACT scores can substitute for passing FCAT scores.

Exit Exam Profile: Virginia

Standards of Learning (SOL) End-of Course Exams

- EOCs in the following subjects: English 11 (reading and writing), Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Earth Science, Chemistry, World History to 1500, World History from 1500 to the Present, Virginia and U.S. History, and World Geography. The tests are aligned to course content standards.
- The tests are administered whenever students complete the associated course. For example, a student who takes Algebra I in grade 7 would take the Algebra I EOC in grade 7.
- Students seeking a Standard Diploma must pass six SOL tests (two English, one math, one science, one social studies, and one other SOL test).
- Students seeking an Advanced Studies Diploma have to pass nine SOL tests (two from each core discipline plus any one of three remaining SOL tests).

Exit Exam Profile: North Carolina

North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test and End-of Course Exams

- Since 1982, students have had to pass a 10th grade comprehensive assessment in reading and mathematics and a computer skills test.
- The state also gives 10 EOCs in various subjects. Students in the class of 2011 or after are required to pass five EOCs in Algebra I, English I, U.S. History, Civics and Economics, and Biology.
- Currently, all EOCs are multiple-choice tests. Districts have the option of administering EOCs online or paper/pencil.
- Currently, schools must use results from all EOCs (including alternate assessments), for at least twenty-five percent (25%) of the student's final grade for each course taken (including and beyond the five required for graduation).

Assessment Policy Decisions

- Assessments are just the means to the end** of understanding how well students, schools and districts are meeting state standards.
- It is important to **consider assessment policy within the larger context of the state's P-20 education system** and efforts to improve learning and teaching.
- The Legislature, SBE and OSPI are **reshaping the statewide system of standards, curriculum, assessment, accountability and high school graduation requirements**.
- State policymakers should **first** address key questions about **high school education policy** and **then** determine which format for the **high school assessments** is most relevant. If lawmakers approve the SBE recommendations for science standards, Core 24 and school accountability, additional EOCs in science may make the most sense for high school testing.



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