



## **Research Brief**

### **Exit Exam Effects**

**Question:** What are the effects of Exit Exams, especially, effects on achievement, dropout rates, high school completion, etc.?

#### **Summary of Findings:**

Approximately half the states have some form of exit exam for graduation. States adopt exit exams to motivate students to work harder and help teachers identify and address student weaknesses. School leaders wonder about their effectiveness. Some argue that they will drive down already low graduation rates, while others argue that they will insure that schools work with students to master basic skills and content.

Some findings do support no negative impact of exit exams. One study (Greene & Winters, 2004), for example, found that adopting a high school exit exam had no effect on a state's graduation rate.

But according to studies at the Center on Education Policy (2004), “the evidence on the effects of exit exams is mixed and tentative; states vary in the number of alternative diploma paths they offer to students who have failed exit exams; and, it is challenging to use exit exams for purposes other than awarding a diploma, such as to indicate college readiness or to meet NCLB accountability provisions.” And (2005), “states are providing additional resources and creating and implementing new policies and programs to help more students pass the tests. Despite these efforts, initial pass rates have remained stagnant and achievement gaps persist, especially in states where exit exams have been in place for several years.” They also examined the impact that these exams have on English Language Learners (ELLs): “The initial pass rate of ELLs on the mathematics exit exam is 30 to 40 percentage points lower than overall initial pass rates, and in reading, the gap is often greater. This raises the possibility that a significant number of ELL students could be denied a high school diploma based on their test performance.”

Other studies find that passing rates are lowest for African American, Hispanic, limited English speaking, and disabled students.

And a study that examined the first year results of the California High School Exit Exam (2003) concluded, “Results suggest this high stakes test failed to meet legislative objectives to increase achievement and close the achievement gap. Instead, language-minority students with passing scores achieved significantly below white students on CAHSEE and on a grade level standards-based assessment.”

The question, of course, then turns to how might we work toward a 100% pass rate. Texas (1987) found that by using a combination of test scores from 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade, they can reasonably predict which students are at risk of not passing the exit exam and are able to offer early supports and remediation.

The Southern Regional Education Board recommends state address these 10 strategies to raise achievement and increase high school completion rates.

1. Initiate a transition program for middle grades to high school;
2. Require schools to develop extra-help systems;
3. Require that every student develop a five-year program of study including one year beyond high school;
4. Require high schools to provide students access to quality career/technical studies;
5. Require every high school teacher to be trained in how to use content-literacy skills and study skills;
6. Require every high school to develop a transition program from high school to college and careers;
7. Expand the use of technology in high school;
8. Examine state policies and their impact on improving graduation rates;
9. Develop a special emphasis on the lowest-performing high schools in the state; and
10. Create a state leadership academy.



## Research Brief

### Online Resources:

(Note: ERIC documents can be found by going to <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> and entering the ERIC ID#)

#### **High School Exit Exams**

A collection of reports from the Center for Education Policy on the high school exit exams.  
<http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/>

#### **High School Exit Exams: Effects on Traditionally Underserved Students**

<http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/ExamMailers/CEPEExamMailers2.pdf>

#### **State High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform**

Keith Gayler, Naomi Chudowsky, Madlene Hamilton, Nancy Kober, and Margery Yeager  
Center on Education Policy (CEP)  
August 2004

The Center on Education Policy's third annual report on state high school exit exam policies reviews the status, characteristics, and effects of exit exams. The report is based on information collected from all 25 states with current or planned exit exams, on the Center's research, and on a review of other major research in this field. The authors find that the evidence on the effects of exit exams is mixed and tentative; states vary in the number of alternative diploma paths they offer to students who have failed exit exams; and, it is challenging to use exit exams for purposes other than awarding a diploma, such as to indicate college readiness or to meet NCLB accountability provisions.

<http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/ExitExamAug2004/ExitExam2004.pdf>

#### **High School Exit Exams**

A collection of reports from the Center for Education Policy on the high school exit exams.  
<http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/>

#### **States Try Harder, But Gaps Persist: High School Exit Exams 2005**

Patricia Sullivan, Margery Yeager, Naomi Chudowsky, Nancy Kober, Eileen O'Brien, and Keith Gayler  
Center on Education Policy - August 2005

The Center on Education Policy's fourth annual report on state exit exams reviews the status, characteristics, and effects of exit exams in the 25 states that currently use or plan to soon implement exit exams. The researchers found that states are providing additional resources and creating and implementing new policies and programs to help more students pass the tests. Despite these efforts, initial pass rates have remained stagnant and achievement gaps persist, especially in states where exit exams have been in place for several years. The authors also examine the impact that these exams have on English Language Learners (ELLs). The initial pass rate of ELLs on the mathematics exit exam is 30 to 40 percentage points lower than overall initial pass rates, and in reading, the gap is often greater. This raises the possibility that a significant number of ELL students could be denied a high school diploma based on their test performance. The authors conclude that states need to provide intensive supports and funding to ensure that all students graduate from high school.

<http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/reportAug2005/hseeAug2005.pdf>

#### **The Relationship to Achievement on the California High School Exit Exam for Language Minority Students.**

Garcia, Paul A.; Gopal, Malati;

NABE Journal of Research and Practice; v1 n1 Win 2003

Examines first year results of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) required for students to earn a high school diploma. Results suggest this high stakes test failed to meet legislative objectives to increase achievement and close the achievement gap. Instead, language-minority students with passing scores achieved significantly below white students on CAHSEE and on a grade level standards-based assessment

ERIC #: EJ666293



## Research Brief

### **A Method for Early Identification of Students Likely to Fail a Minimum Competency Exit Level Test: Early Prediction of Scores on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS).**

Bostic, Jeff Q.; And Others

1987-02-00

The public schools reform movement has led to a proliferation of minimum competency testing programs by states. At the 11th/12th grade level, the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), mandated by Texas House Bill 72, is an exit exam, divided into two sections which measure minimum competencies in math and language skills. Students failing to demonstrate mastery are required to retake and master that portion(s) of the exam to graduate from a Texas-accredited high school. Thus, methods of early identification of students at risk to fail the TEAMS exit test should be useful to school personnel. This study, conducted for the Lubbock Independent School District, isolated six variables which, in various combinations, predicted students' TEAMS scores at approximately 80 percent accuracy. As some of these variables may be collected and TEAMS scores predicted up to two years before students first take the TEAMS exit test, a variety of remediation options are available to school districts.

ERIC #: ED281893

### **10 Strategies for Raising Achievement and Improving High School Completion Rates**

Bottoms, Gene;

2004-11-00

No state can afford to have the percentage of young people who are failing to finish high school remain at the present levels nor can they afford to ease the standards. This document discusses 10 strategies that states can implement to raise achievement and increase high school completion rates.

ERIC #: ED485279

Full Text Available here:

[http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2004Pubs/04V50\\_10Strategies\\_Raising\\_Achievement.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2004Pubs/04V50_10Strategies_Raising_Achievement.pdf)

### **Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper 5**

Greene, Jay P.; Winters, Marcus A.;

2004-05-00

To ensure that students who receive high school diplomas meet basic thresholds of academic proficiency and job readiness, 24 states have adopted exit exams that students must pass to graduate. Opponents of these exams complain that they drive already-low graduation rates downward. They argue that raising the bar for graduation forces many students, minority students in particular, to drop out. This study uses two highly respected graduation rate calculations to evaluate what effect high school exit exams have on graduation rates. The results for both graduation rate calculations show that adopting a high school exit exam has no effect on a state's graduation rate. The analyses also show that neither reducing class sizes nor increasing education spending leads to higher graduation rates.

ERIC #: ED483336

### **Making Sure Exit Exams Get a Passing Grade. Policy Brief.**

2003-06-00

By 2008, according to this policy brief, half the states are likely to have adopted high-school exit exams. These exams, which students must pass to graduate, are part of state accountability systems and are above and beyond the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. This brief discusses high-school exit exams. It begins with answers to three key fairness-related questions that state policymakers should address when considering exit-exam policies: (1) Who will be tested? (2) What are the stakes? and (3) What is needed to help students pass? The brief then describes the experiences of Arizona, California, Maryland, and Massachusetts with exit exams. The brief concludes with a list of policy recommendations to assure that the system guarantees the following: match of exam content and purpose; alignment of standards, curriculum, and graduation requirements; well-prepared teachers and high-quality professional-development programs; early identification and intervention; testing at appropriate grade level; test accommodations to address special needs of students; use of effective data systems; remediation strategies to help all students pass the exam; and ongoing evaluation of the exit exam and its consequences.

ERIC #: ED480739

For full text: [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/PO-03-01.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/PO-03-01.pdf)



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## Research Brief

### **Effects of High School Exit Exams on Dropout Rates: Summary of a Panel Discussion.**

Chudowsky, Naomi; Gayler, Keith;

This paper summarizes a panel discussion that addressed exit-exam policies and dropout issues. It presents the panel members' conclusions about existing research and their recommendations on what kinds of further work are needed. Research on how exit exams affect dropout rates is limited and inconclusive, so policies continue to be made in the absence of good information about the consequences for students and society. Most of the paper focuses on the paucity of research as it offer recommendations for further research, including longitudinal studies. The paper does, however, recap some research on dropouts that focused on the underlying reasons for dropping out. The paper concludes with the following recommendations for policymakers to support better information and practices on the potential costs and benefits of exit exams: (1) Report more informative exit-exam results; (2) improve data systems; (3) provide incentives for accurate recordkeeping; (4) keep historical records; (5) consider menus of policies; and (6) support success.

ERIC #: ED482254

Full Text available:

<http://www.cep-dc.org/highschoolexit/1/hspanelsummary/hspanel.summary15mar03.pdf>

Submitted Date: 3/19/2006 By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

<http://www.principalspartnership.com>

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