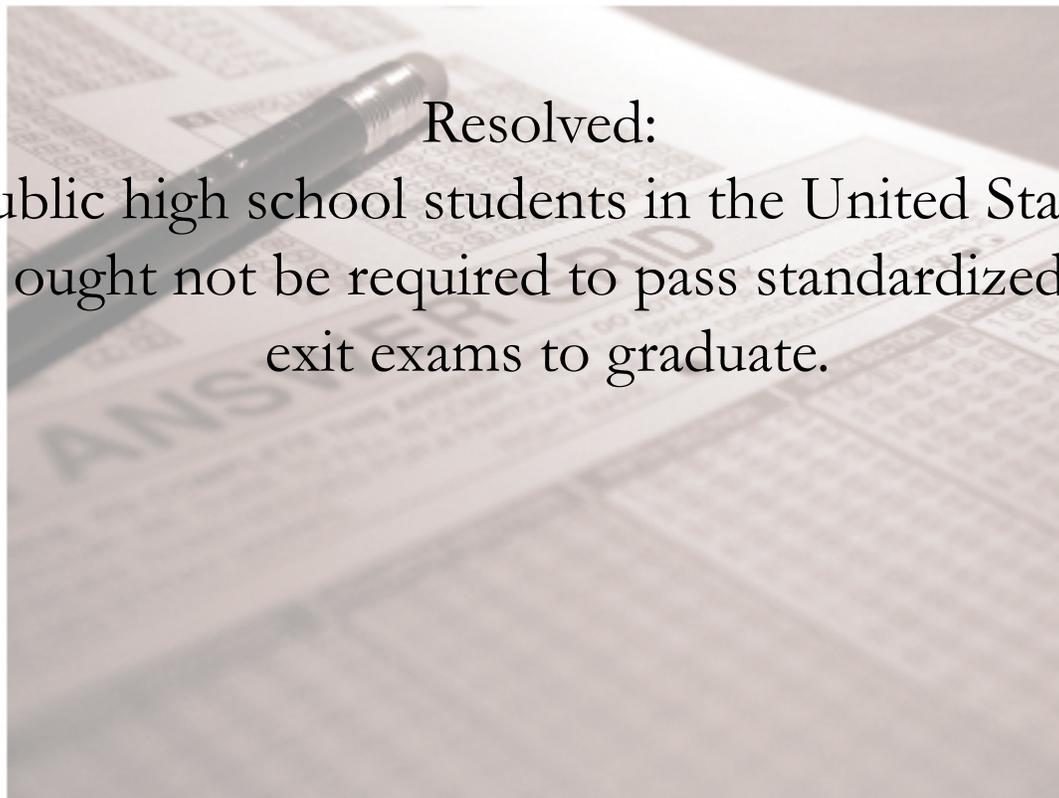


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Topic Analysis



Resolved:
Public high school students in the United States
ought not be required to pass standardized
exit exams to graduate.

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Topic Analysis by Cameron Baghai

Public high school students in the United States ought not be required to pass standardized exit exams to graduate.

Before I get started, I want to talk a little bit about the function of topic analysis in the briefs. This is your springboard and starting point. The debaters who only read this, pull a few cards from the evidence section, and throw together a case will leave tournaments disappointed. Alternatively, the debaters who use this as supplemental and go beyond what's discussed here will (or at least can) have a successful season.

DEFINITIONS

Let's start with the basics. What in the world is the resolution talking about?

Public: The resolution specifies public schools. This seems to strengthen the link to arguments dealing with poverty and the underprivileged. Also, it could be used as a reason why the resolitional action is within the scope of the USFG.

High School Students: The kids we're talking about are ones in high school; this seems to indicate "to graduate" and "exit exams" mean a diploma. This seems pretty obvious but in my experience with camp some people forgot about the contextualization of high school. Arguments dealing with middle school or some other form of graduation aren't relevant.

In the United States: More and more often resolutions are specific and policy oriented. The specification of the US raises some questions:

1) Who takes the action in the resolution? Is it the United States Federal Government?

That interpretation seems the most obvious given that the resolution discusses the United States as a whole. However, the USFG doesn't have the authority to enforce national school policies (No Child Left Behind was encouraged but not mandated).

2) By specifying the US, does the resolution intend for us to have a policy-type discussion? Is the explicit geographical limitation a hint at an implicit temporal limitation? In other words, are we supposed to be talking about the status quo

(educational system right now)? If the topic is about the status quo, then what tests would the resolution implement? Currently, there are no national standardized exit exams.

Ought—American Heritage has multiple definitions of ought including: obligation, duty, advisability, prudence, desirability, and probability. This presents multiple approaches to the topic:

Obligation/Duty-These terms are in line with the ethical interpretation of ought. This allows for the affirmative to use theories of morality strategically and efficiently. Specifically, it would lend itself to a deontological/side constraint affirmative.

Desirability-This is the definition that will result in policy-esque, impact comparison debates. As more judges on the national circuit move toward paradigms encouraging comparing worlds and policies, having cases with that focus becomes more necessary. In fact, I think having a desirability/should case is imperative on this topic.

Probability-This is the oh so loved “logical consequence” affirmative. Running a case discussing only the likelihood (and not the morality/probability) of standardized exit exams is something I’d advise against. Generally speaking, judges dislike this argument, and winning the case would require a) Resolving the actor ambiguity in the resolution b) winning the interpretation of ought c) winning offense to that interpretation and d) overcoming the judge’s bias against the case. Given that, and the availability of other positions that deal with more substantive issues, it might make sense to avoid writing a logical consequence case. (While I will admit I’ve written logical consequence cases before, I think this resolution specifically makes winning that debate hard).

Ought NOT—There are two (main) ways to think about ought not.

Prohibition Approach: This says that it is not permissible that high schoolers are required to take the test. This interpretation seems to be the most intuitive one—if I say “you ought not eat peanut butter because you will have an allergic reaction” I am establishing that you are forbidden from something.

Permission Approach: I'll preface this by saying that the former interpretation is much more reasonable/assumed. However, it is possible to justify an interpretation of ought as merely being that one not ought, or in other words, it is not required that high schoolers pass the exam to graduate. This would make the affirmative burden much easier, because all it would need to do is show that exams are not required, as opposed to the prohibition approach, which demands showing that exams are not allowed.

To Pass—While I think the definition of “to pass” is pretty simple and intuitive, I don't think that that means it should be ignored. Contextualizing what it would take to pass an exam could help the negative delink some affirmative offense (if the requirements for passing are not high, then presumably the number that do not pass is lower).

Standardized Exit Exams—The resolution leaves the exact nature of the tests rather ambiguous. Even though standardized exit exams, or SEEs, have a pretty clear definition in topic literature, the national scope of the resolution demands one evaluate exactly how standardized the tests will be. Will they differ from state to state? From city to city? Similarly, what about differences between different test taking groups? The SAT, the stereotypical standardized test, gives those with ADHD unlimited time to take the test.

THE FRAMEWORK

Aff—I think a smart affirmative on this topic would take advantage of the “ought not” phrasing in the resolution. While side constrains, deontology, and necessary but sufficient cases have often been the territory of the negative, this topic allows the affirmative to reclaim that ground. For example, the affirmative can argue that unequal tests cannot be given, so outside the content of the test, unequal SESEs ought not be given.

Further, using framework to spike out of negative cases could be very useful.

Specification of the kind of SEE could delink some negative positions. At the very least, it will give you more options during the rebuttals.

Neg—Setting a side-constraint NC on this topic would be a little harder. Because side-constraint/deontological cases usually deal with prohibitions, proving that students ought to take tests via deontological analysis would be difficult (the argument that that they should be used only because there is a prohibition against not using them seems pretty ridiculous.)

Alternatively, using the NC framework to specify the debate to discuss a particular kind of test would be in the negative's favor. Such a strategy could delink a lot of affirmative arguments and get the negative offense, but we'll talk about that later.

POSITIONS

AFF

Discrimination: This was a very popular position at camp. The basic argument is that 1) the US ought not have policies that discriminate and 2) SEEs discriminate. Authors discuss discrimination against certain races (due to cultural and linguistic knowledge), socioeconomic classes (due to access to resources), and other groups of people (like the mentally challenged). A big problem with how some of these cases were structured is uniqueness. Discrimination is already hugely prevalent in the US and the education system specifically—how much worse do SEEs make it? I think that in order to make this argument compelling, the affirmative should include arguments proving that graduation is key to moving up on the social ladder. By combining this with the argument that SEEs prevent the underprivileged from graduating, one could argue that SEEs effectively “freeze” certain groups into their social class. Further, I think using the contention to also prove tests are inaccurate would be strategic.

Shallow Knowledge: I'd also characterize this as a fairly stock argument. The case claims that SEEs lead to shallowness in terms of educational knowledge. Offense is derived from multiple arguments: teachers might “teach to the test” to get better scores, students may focus on memorization and cookie-cutter answers instead of critical thinking because of the content of the test, and more advanced students waste class time because they're forced to prepare for a test below their skill level. The trick with this case is quantifying substantial impacts. Reading evidence explaining just how shallow class becomes as a result of testing is key. The negative will likely respond to

this case with evidence showing that testing increases knowledge through accountability, making it critical that the affirmative is able to win the weighing debate.

Accuracy: This position argues that SEEs are inaccurate and ought not be used. This case might work because it challenges the assumption behind testing—that it's an accurate representation of knowledge. In order to be effective though, the AC would need to be framed as offensive (the test is bad because it doesn't work) instead of just defensive (the test does not work so there's no reason to have it).

NEG:

Accountability: The test provides an objective way to measure the success of both students and teachers. This, in addition to the threat of not graduating, provides incentive to both groups to work hard during the year so as to excel on the test. Like the discrimination aff, uniqueness will be very important but many debaters will overlook it. Given the existence of other methods of testing for accountability (GPA, SAT, ACT, standardized non-exit exams, etc.) the question this case should answer is: Why do tests need to be high-stakes (i.e. necessary for graduation) to promote accountability?

Parametricization: This negative position defends a very specific advocacy like a standardized sex ed exam, civics exam, or mathematics exam. There are a couple of advantages of arguing this. First, a strategic advocacy could delink most affirmative offense. Debaters get lazy, and many ACs will make assumptions about the test being administered. Challenging those assumptions could effectively operate as terminal defense on the Ac. Second, a good position will have access to strong offense easy to win. Certain tests could have very compelling justifications, and arguing these instead of the generic "language and math" tests will be beneficial. Finally, a good debater always debates on his or her own terms. By specifying one kind of test, the negative can ensure that the speeches focus on what (s)he wants them to focus on. However, there's no such thing as the perfect position. By running a very specific advocacy the negative opens itself up to theory objections. Arguments dealing with predictability, topic literature, and real world tests could challenge a specific negative advocacy. Also, the case should be very careful in establishing uniqueness; the advantages need to be only possible through standardized exit exams as opposed to just any standardized exams.

Federalism: This case argues that the resolution indicates that the federal government can dictate state education, but that is a bad thing. Justifications for why federal control over the education system is bad range from efficacy to constitutionality. The strategy behind this case is that it, when framed effectively, can release the negative from having to defend SEEs as a good thing. However, I think a big problem with most federalism NCs is that debaters will take for granted that the actor in the resolution is the USFG. There are compelling reasons to believe that the action is not carried out by the federal government, and having answers to those arguments is necessary to successfully execute this NC.

Equality: This is basically the opposite of the affirmative discrimination position. It argues that standardized tests, by definition, provide an equal, and therefore fair, metric by which to measure students. While GPA unquestionably varies by teacher and school, and standardized test could a more uniform metric by which to measure students. The impacts could extend beyond equality to encompass accuracy of evaluation, as well as other things.

CAUTIONS

1) Solving what you need to solve. The past few topics have been pretty intense. On the ICC topic, words like war and international conflict were common. And military conscription—I mean, come on! Those big, sexy impacts were pretty easy to get to. This topic is a little bit closer to home, making this huge impacts somewhat less accessible. Unfortunately, we've gotten used to them. The consequence? Ridiculous link stories. I'm going to let you in on a little secret: a reasonable, defensible link to a medium sized impact is better than a ridiculous link to a bigger one. So please, don't go for the nuclear war impact. Forego the assertion that standardized tests cause genocide. Instead, let's be reasonable.

2) The criterion/contention disjunct. We tend to justify value criterions with some pretty cool claims. Discrimination is bad because it's genocidal, and will lead to massive rights abuses. The problem with these kinds of warrants is that they require a brink.

Discrimination may, in fact, cause genocide (it does). However, in order for the genocide impact to be triggered, a certain brink, or threshold of discrimination must be met. After all, while using discriminatory methods to choose your friends is bad, it certainly won't result in millions of deaths. This topic makes this disjunct even more problematic. Debaters will try to link to a criterion with pretty small levels of impact while simultaneously claiming that the criterion is necessary because without it the world goes straight to hell. Think about what your criterion and justifications for it indicate. Think about brinks. Ask yourself: is the way I am justifying my criterion consistent with the way I am impacting to it?

3) Pay attention to the resolution. At camp, I saw a lot of people talking about No Child Left behind. While referencing a specific policy is good because it quantifies a lot of the issues being discussed, NCLB is not a SEE. It is not required to graduate. Similarly, many cases will discuss standardized tests in general. Absent justifications for fiatting extra-topical things, you must have developed and unique offense to exit exams.

4) Keep an open mind. A decent number of people complained when this topic was originally chosen (not going to lie, I might have been one of them). However, like most other topics, I think most of you will come around. There's a ton of topic literature out there, and much of it is not only interesting, but applicable to the lives of most high school debaters.

That's it from me. Good luck and have fun debating!

Topic Analysis by Ryan Hamilton

This resolution, unlike those that are perhaps grander in scale, provides students with the opportunity to debate policy that has immediate effect on their lives while they are in high school. While some debaters may lament the difficult link story to nuclear war impacts or similarly outrageous impact stories, I think that it should be seen as an opportunity to gain depth of knowledge on a topic that is all too often overlooked in the debate community, but one that is central to its existence: education policy.

That having been said, this topic is unique in another way. To a degree not found in other topics, this one presents several questions that must be answered in the framework prior to a sensible debate on issues that occurs at a contention level. Questions about for whom the prohibition is, what sense of ought makes the most sense, and to what extent a test must be administered and uniform before it can be considered “standardized” all must be established prior to engaging in a debate about the substance of the resolution.

The topic literature seems to suggest that in terms of the United States, any test that is administered at or above the state level is what determines if it is standardized or not. This seems to make sense: in terms of educational policy, states are not directly responsible to the Federal government in any way. A test mandated by the Federal Government – like those found in the No Child Left Behind Act – certainly meets the threshold because all fifty states will be administering the exam. However, the link between why a school district-wide test is **not** standardized and a state-wide test is standardized is less clear, especially when one considers that the New York City Department of Education has jurisdiction over twice the number of students than Wyoming – and more students than Vermont and four other states have residents. The salient

distinction, then, must be that the NYCDE is subject to a higher educational authority – in particular the State Legislature of New York – while *state-wide* education policies have no higher authority to which they must account or answer, at least in theory.

In practice, the only way that the Federal government can exercise control over states' education policies is by passing legislation that will punish states not in compliance with mandates in the same piece of legislation. This is similar to how the Federal government mandates a drinking age of 21: if states were noncompliant, they promised to revoke or diminish Federal money into the state, especially road work projects. Similarly, the Federal government is able to command state obedience through the No Child Left Behind Act because it threatens the money that pours into states from the Federal Government to supplement state-based education budgets. Without this money, states would not be able to maintain sophisticated education programs, which would translate into significant problems for any state.

The prohibition against standardized exit exams, however, would have to cover more than just particular states: the resolution specifies “public high school students in the United States,” as opposed to any one region or state. I’m not sure that there is a compelling argument that, even when discussed conceptually and abstractly, the resolution can be limited reasonably to a smaller geographical or political region or jurisdiction.

The sense of ought is also unclear. Typically ought links to back to moral duty, but this resolution doesn’t offer a clearer link to the definition of ought as moral duty than a definition of ought as advisable or desirable. Both debaters will have to either come to an agreement in cross examination or provide good arguments as to why the judge ought to prefer their definition as opposed to their opponents to establish any precise ability to weigh between arguments.

To that end, I think the most persuasive affirmative position is one that criticizes a country-wide prohibition on standardized exit exams. This requires a framework argument that says (and it is easy to make this argument) that the only way that we can have any meaningful discussion of the resolution is on a federal level, given that the resolution specifies all students within the United States. This means that negating pro-actively establishes a standardized exit exam on the Federal level. Affirming simply means that public high school students shouldn't be required to pass a standardized exit exam – and since we've established that standardized almost certainly means at a state wide level, then it stands to reason students can take a community organized exit exam that doesn't qualify as standardized.

The notion of a federally mandated educational policy (which is the only practical way an affirmative can discuss the resolution) isn't appealing to even hardened liberal centralists: states in the union are supposed to function as laboratories of democracy. The degree to which states are able to pioneer new, innovative, efficient, and successful policy can be significantly limited by unnecessary and onerous burdens and mandates foisted on them by the Federal government. With this in mind, there are two arguments that naturally unfold.

First, affirmatives are able to link into the compelling impacts of local democracy: communities ought to be able to have control over their educational policies to the greatest extent possible insofar as parents have a right to determine the broad strokes of their children's education (which is an argument easily won), and further, to determine the specific requirements of graduation for their communities. It is not hard to understand why more rural communities would demand less stringent liberal arts curriculum for the sake of a focus on applied sciences or agricultural classes. To be sure, if they are entitled to localized control over the curriculum, then certainly it is a short jump to the idea that they should be in control over to what degree a student must have acquired knowledge to be certified as a "graduate" of the same system.

The second, and probably most common affirmative strategy, will be talking about how tests are in some way bias against this minority or that disadvantaged group – something like that. I am not a fan of this position, so I will offer some thoughts on how people who believe this to be the best strategy can make it more palatable who don't think that correcting alleged biased should be the central driving force behind every single test of truth or policy statement.

Primarily, I think that there needs to be weighing done: why is it more important that we abolish testing that certifies whether or not students have actually learned something so that people who do not pass the exam (typically identified as minorities) are forced to stay in school until they have learned it or elect to drop out? Moreover, isn't the point of a test to be discriminatory? Shouldn't tests discriminate between those who have been educated and those who have not been educated?

I also think that it is imperative that affirmatives who elect to run this position become intimately familiar with the methodology that their evidence uses to conclude that standardized tests are racist: it is not obvious or evident to even the educated observer or people who have taken exams how or why they are racist. Negatives who are wise will question how the author knows or what methods they used to determine this – even if they surveyed 12 standardized tests over a period of time, what standards did they use to determine that they were biased on the basis of race or class? There seem to me to be a lot of questions about how one determines a test is biased on the basis of race.

I think one of the most interesting discussions that can happen when the negative is cross-examining the affirmative case is to ask how tests can be racist. Affirmatives can probably site a large number of studies that have reached this conclusion, but it is also important on an educational level that affirmatives be able to explain not simply that a test is racist or otherwise bias because some

ivory tower academic has decreed it to be so from his plush office in New England. Moreover, for the sake of exposing potential inconsistencies, after this is established, it might be worthwhile to see if the affirmative will answer questions about alternatives to racist tests – if tests are racist simply because white people write them, is the fix as easy as making sure to include particular minority groups in the writing committee?

Further, I think it is also important that the negative draw analogies between high school exit exams and other exams administered by the government to ensure proficiency: would we grant drivers' licenses to people who merely showed up to drivers' education without demonstrating any practical proficiency in terms of driving an automobile? No, because that would put people's lives at risk. We all only agree to drive and be tested insofar as the state is able to reasonably ensure that people who are on the road are qualified to drive. It is a buy in system. The same is true with education – employers will only agree to accept public school diplomas insofar as they reasonable certify that students are proficient in the subjects taught in school – they want to ensure that students are literate with a basic command of mathematics and a basic understanding of the historical context of American society. It is fair to assume that if the state did stopped providing this certification, or granted degrees without verifying that students were reasonably proficient in the above categories, private employers would institute their own tests to eliminate the uneducated from their hiring pools.

I think the negative has the best case positions, in particular when it comes to turns that are available to make on affirmative case positions that talk about how tests are bias. Negative impact stories are easy to draw off of students who are forced to study for tests so that they can pass: if even one student picks up one book and learns one fact, it is more impact back to education that the affirmative can claim to draw. More to the point, it is the negative that actually helps minorities and other disadvantaged populations.

Simply handing off the degree reeks of condescension – that they are unable to learn the material on which they are to be tested, so we might as well just give them a degree and let them get on with it. But the degree isn't what actually leads to all of the good impacts that affirmatives will claim – higher incomes, less family disintegration, etc. – are really consequences of *the education* which is *symbolized* by a degree. Moreover, if degrees are to be granted, it seems that the state (more than anyone else involved) has an incentive to make sure that they verify what they are meant to verify. This position also had the advantage of not being dependent on a means based impact – the state should not lie, period.

A lot of politicians, Mitt Romney in particular, believe that education is the civil rights issue of the 21st century. If it is true that minorities graduate at a lesser rate than the majority, then the solution is not simply to graduate those students, but to design a system that teaches them the skills necessary to be able to pass the test. The impact of granting a degree without first educating the students is negligible – it doesn't educate them, at all, for future experiences. The fact that knowledge after taught isn't tested isn't an effective replication of life after school either – if I am taught a particular skill in my job and then fail to be able to show an ability to apply that knowledge in a practical situation, I will most likely lose my job. In this way, the test itself serves (regardless of pass or fail) serves as an effective way of educating students for the rest of their lives.

If one is insistent on making enormous impact scenarios – the United States needs to be globally competitive, and the only way to do that is close the education gap with emerging Asian giants like India and China. I have heard somewhere that the number of students who are in the top two percentile of IQ in Indian high schools outnumbers the entire population of students in secondary school in the United States. We cannot continue to let the particular concerns of this group or that get in the way of an old fashioned education that prepares students for experiences after school, particularly in the workplace. The only way to ensure that students are graduating with a command of the information and

tools necessary to succeed, and by extension, preserve the hegemony the United States currently has. Our weapons systems are only as good as the physicists we have to design them.

Topic Analysis by Fritz Pielstick

I personally am very excited that the NFL and the LD debate community came together to select a topic that pertains to public education. Education is a realm of American domestic policy that, frankly, does not receive the attention that it rightfully deserves, despite the overwhelming significance it bears for virtually all Americans. As students, we are subject to all of the decisions made by our elected officials about education policy. As debaters, we are asked to discuss some of the most relevant political issues of our time. Therefore, I see it as only fitting that the LD debate community be asked to discuss public education policy for the next two months.

The following analysis is a roughly organized collection of my thoughts on potential strategies for affirming and (*oh-no!*) negating this topic, as well as my thoughts about the topic in and of itself. As I was writing this introduction, I was passively listening to my “Rolling Stones” playlist. I soon came to the realization that all of the thoughts I was planning to share with you hold at least some relevance to a song on said playlist. Therefore, I went out of my way to point this out to you all. Enjoy!

Part One: The Topic—*You Can't Always Get What You Want*

I am not going to pretend that I did not partake in the initial lamenting of this topic. I *really* wanted it to be the torture warrants topic, and I know that a large portion of the debating community shared that sentiment. No one *wants* to debate about that dumb high school exit exam we all had to pass when we can instead debate about Guantanamo Bay, secret prisons, waterboarding, and...wait for it...*TERRORISM!* But alas, you can't always get what you want. Still, I think that this topic has a strong potential to produce some very high

quality debates. There certainly is a vast ocean of easily accessible literature pertaining to education, and to standardized tests in particular. Good debaters will rise above their initial distain for the topic and make arguments that work for them. With hard work and smart strategy, there are some *fantastic* arguments to be made here.

Part Two: People Say This Topic Doesn't Have Impacts—*Lies!*

Some of the initial criticism of this topic came from those who insisted that this topic is not conducive to good impact debates. This doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Surely, the debaters have more to do with creating a good impact debate than the topic? Granted, this topic may not produce the genocide/nuclear war/terrorism *apoca-palooza* that manifested itself in the ICC topic and the nukes topic, among others. But it is nonsensical to say that arguments about how we ought to educate people have no impact. The simplest way to give impact to your case, in my opinion, is to begin by asking yourself the following question: *Why do we educate people?* In other words, what is the ultimate goal of education? Is it to eliminate ignorance, is it to promote democracy, is it to liberate the oppressed, or is it for some other, unmentioned reason? Does this question produce some important and thought-provoking answers? If so, then you are on the right track to creating an interesting impact debate for your judge to evaluate.

As long as our education policies affect people, then arguments about education will have impact in the context of a debate round. If you go, or went, to a public school in one of the 26 states that currently use exit exams, you probably have some sort of opinion on whether or not these tests ought to be used. Moreover, your opinions were probably shaped by how this test *impacted* you personally. If exit exams prohibit people from graduating high school and thus doom them to a life of poverty and marginalization, you have an impact story to tell. If exit exams are necessary to give some sort of value to the high school diploma students spent 12 years trying to earn, then *presto!* Impacts! There are some very compelling arguments to be made here that impact about issues such

as poverty, race, oppression, liberation, marginalization, competitiveness in the global market, and more. We shouldn't resign ourselves to not being able to think of impacts just because our case may produce a link story to Khalilzad '95 or that is contrived at best.

I am also hoping that maybe if debaters on this topic make use of slightly "smaller" impact stories, they may focus more heavily on weighing out the specific internal links to these impacts, rather than relying upon the sheer grandiose of their impacts in order to win debates. (No more "Extend Schell '92, nuke war outweighs all else. My opponent concedes this, I win!"). Just hoping...

Part Three: Affirming—*Beast of Burden(s)*

This is another topic that has a "flipped burdens" setup. My suspicion is that the NFL wording committee did this to make the debates fairer. Most of the available literature argues that exit exams are bad, and so it would be virtually impossible for the affirmative to have to overcome both time skew *and* a comparative lack of literature. Switching the burdens is simply a means of compensation for the skewed literature base.

The addition of the word "not" to the topic also gives the affirmative some interesting options when it comes to affirming this topic. I think virtually all affirmative cases will operate under one of the three following setups:

- The affirmative can read arguments that functionally negate the idea there *should* be exit exams.
- The affirmative can specify some alternative to exit exams and explain why this is preferable, and thus, why we ought to do that instead, and why this means we *ought not* use exit exams.
- The affirmative can propose some advocacy or plan text to eradicate the use of exit exams, and weigh the benefits of this plan or advocacy against the status quo, in which we use exit exams.

I will explore, in greater depth, each of these three strategies.

Strategy One: Negating the Idea That There Should Be Exit Exams

This is the simplest, most straightforward strategy, and I predict it will be the most common. The concept of the affirmative simply being a “negation of the negation” is merely a rational way to explain that the affirmative must indict, or negate, some concept or idea; in this case it is exit exams. As contrasted with previous topics that asked the affirmative to defend something (*we should* join the ICC), this topic asks the affirmative to criticize or indict something. It must prove the opposite of something (*we should not* require students to pass exit exams). The implicit burden here for the affirmative is to simply prove why exit exams are a bad thing. The standard in the affirmative case (assuming the case uses a standard) will likely specify some conception of good (for example, respect for equal human worth), and prove why negating *violates* this, rather than proving why affirming upholds this. For example:

“I value justice, defined as giving each their due. The standard is respecting equal human worth because all humans are due equal treatment. My thesis is that exit exams violate this standard because they are unfairly biased against racial minorities.”

Strategy Two: Proposing an Alternative to Exit Exams

I predict this will be the second-most common strategy utilized by affirmative debaters. The affirmative will argue that we ought not require students to pass exit exams because we ought to do something else instead. Much like most stock affirmative cases will simply be a negation of the concept of negating; this strategy essentially constitutes running a counterplan to the negative advocacy. Therefore, before you begin writing your “there is a better alternative” affirmative case, remember that your affirmative case essentially is a counterplan, and therefore must meet the following two guidelines in order to be legitimate:

- You must prove it is competitive. The idea of competition is what prevents the judge from affirming and negating at the same time. Competition means it is either (a) impossible or (b) undesirable to have both the affirmative and negative advocacy done simultaneously. To be competitive you either need to explain to the judge why it is impossible to do whatever alternative you advocate in the AC and do exit exams at the same, or you need to explain why it would be a bad idea to do your alternative and do exit exams at the same time. To accomplish the former, you need to prove that the existence of your alternative precludes the existence of exit exams, and vice versa. To accomplish the latter, you would to explain why exit exams are bad.
- You must prove it is net-beneficial. In order to prove that we ought to abandon exit exams in favor of some other alternative, it is necessary to prove that the alternative is better than exit exams. If you cannot prove that there is any reason to prefer your alternative, there is no reason to reject exit exams, and thus no reason to affirm.

Strategy Three: A Plan That Eliminates Exit Exams

This will probably be the least common of the three potential strategies for affirming, given that textual advocacies (plans) are not universally viewed as legitimate within in the LD debate community. On certain topics, particularly those that simply assert a statement of supposed truth (military conscription *is* unjust); plan texts don't make a ton of sense. On this topic, however, I think there is room for some really good plan text AC's. Affirmative cases that offer a plan to be passed by the United States Federal Government can create some interesting debates that are not only about education, but are also about issues such as federalism and states' rights. Right now, there are huge discrepancies among individual states in how these exit exams are implemented. The idea that federal action is necessary to eradicate these problems is one that can be compelling, if executed correctly.

If running a plan text on this topic is what you want to do, you're going to need to make sure that your plan text (a) solves the impacts you articulate and that (b) these impacts outweigh the impacts coming out of the negative case or counterplan. Be very careful about the issue of solvency. Remember that by running a plan text, you are essentially giving yourself a solvency burden, a burden you most likely would not have using another framework. Be sure to cut plenty of solvency evidence, and cut good extension evidence for the 1AR. You do not want to lose rounds because you can't answer all of the negative's solvency turns in your 4-minute 1AR.

Let's Get Critical!

I left this out of the analysis on the various strategies for affirming because critical arguments can manifest themselves under almost any framework. One can critically negate the concept of using exit exams, propose an alternative with critical benefits, or offer a plan that solves for critical impacts.

Some of the earliest lauding of this topic came from those who anticipating the numerous critical positions that can be derived from the bailout-sized bank vault of critical literature that is relevant to this particular resolution. The critical literature (like most literature on this topic) seems to overwhelmingly favor the affirmative. Right of the bat, one can think of a few critical positions the affirmative can read with relative ease. Brazilian education philosopher Paulo Freire and American education philosopher John Dewey both wrote extensively about how we ought to reform our modern education system. Both were highly critical of standardized education. Freire's best known work The Pedagogy of the Oppressed will be referenced many times in this topic. Dewey (himself a professor at Columbia for several decades) advocated a style of education that conformed to individual needs and talents. In the lengthy list of works by Dewey, one will find numerous arguments that portray standardized testing in a negative light.

There are also some critical positions that could be extrapolated from the implications of using exit exams themselves. The obvious disadvantage faced by racial and ethnic minorities on such tests could potentially open up some compelling positions about race relations in the United States. And finally, we have to consider the ramifications of students being forced to take a *government*-operated test on *government*-sanctioned material administered by *government*-paid officials. Seems *incredibly* biopolitical, doesn't it?

Part Four: Negating—*I Can't Get No Satisfaction*

The vast majority of complains I have seen pertaining to this topic lament the relative lack of negative ground. Proclaiming that there is *absolutely zero negative ground* is somewhat hyperbolic. I think the more legitimate complaint to be made is that there is a comparative lack of *interesting* negative ground. I think debaters are somewhat discouraged because most of the negative arguments that they have thought of so far are not particularly exciting or stimulating. The first step in overcoming this is doing research. The reason why we are having trouble conceiving of imaginative cases is that we don't have very much information to draw arguments from. Read heavily into the topic literature and you will immerse yourself in the nuances of the topic. Expanding your knowledge of the American public education system will enable you to think of arguments that are more nuanced and creative. The second step in overcoming this is diversifying your strategy. Writing multiple negative cases is always a good idea, but it's a fantastic idea on this particular resolution. The affirmative has substantially more literature from which to draw arguments and they most likely have a more legitimate claim on most of the critical positions that can be run on this topic. To compensate for these two factors, write *a lot* of negative arguments. Have a broad array of positional negative cases that are designed to answer the broad array of affirmative cases that will be run on this topic. If you are still convinced that there is not enough literature from which to draw a slew of negative positions, your next best weapon is to anticipate what exactly the affirmative is going to run, and prepare a slew of answers that you can make to

the affirmative case. Write many, many blocks, discuss with others how the affirmative might approach this topic, and think of ways to answer these arguments. If you are not confident in your ability to compete on the negative flow, do as much work as possible to overwhelm the affirmative flow.

However, I believe that when you begin working, you will find that there are many ways you can negate this topic. Once again, ask yourself some questions. First, *why do exit exams exist?* In other words, when states choose to implement high school exit exams, what is their motivation? Second, *what would be the alternative to not having exit exams at all?* In other words, what happens when we rely solely on grade-based academic performance as the sole determinant of whether or not a student graduates? Are grades reliable, or objective? Are there flaws in the grading system that could be compensated for by implementing exit exams?

I predict the most common negative case will be that a high school diploma has a value that must be respected, and that the exit exam allows for this. One thing to consider is that high school exit exams are extraordinarily easy. In California, for example, all public high school students are required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). This test is taken by students in the 10th grade. The mathematics section tests 10th grade students on 8th grade math and the language arts section tests them on 10th grade English. The high school diploma is given to students who have successfully completed twelve years of education. Does a student really deserve a certificate that says they have completed twelve years of schooling when they cannot even perform 8th or 10th grade level work? Additionally, in California (and I can only assume in other states), students are given multiple opportunities to pass the test and are required to take a class that educates them on the specific material found on the CAHSEE. There are certainly arguments to be made that students who cannot pass 8th grade or 10th grade tests after being given multiple opportunities to do and taking a class on the material do not deserve to be handed a diploma that

signifies their completion of twelve years of schooling. This argument can be common, but that does not make it a bad argument.

Pic Me! Pic Me!

Many debaters will likely employ a strategy of running a sort of Plan-Inclusive-Counterplan that specifies one type of exit exam, and advocates for it. For example: “*We should require students with less than a 2.0 GPA to take exit exams*” or “*We should require students to take exit exams in only a certain subject area, such as mathematics.*” There are some very obvious advantages to this strategy. First, you can potentially avoid biting a lot of the affirmative’s impacts, and make their arguments non-unique. For example, if the affirmative runs a case that argues that exit exams unfairly discriminate against the mentally disabled, the negative has the ground to run a case that advocates administering exit exams to all students who are not mentally disabled. Second, the vast number of ways that a negative debater can potentially “pic” (it’s a verb—I swear) out of the affirmative case can potentially compensate for the other advantages that the affirmative has. PIC’s run by the negative have tons of potential to be unique and interesting, and for the affirmative debater, unexpected.

If you are going to run a PIC-style argument on the negative, do not run it “halfway”. Explicitly define what you are advocating. A counterplan text is most likely your friend. Setting up your case as a moving target (a) sets up the inevitable theory debate, (b) makes it harder for the judge to know what your position is, and (c) makes it harder for you to claim solvency for your impacts. If we don’t know exactly what you are doing, how do we know what you accomplish?

There are always arguments that can be made. Negating this resolution may be somewhat challenging, but it’s not impossible.

Like Kevin Garnett, anything is possible!

-The Lonely Island

Topic Analysis by Alex Zhao

So I'm not entirely sure on how to organize this kind of analysis, but it will most likely follow the general order of cases and speaking times. That is, I'm going to start with some definitional analysis, followed by general advice to both sides regarding values, and then specific affirmative and negative positions.

A note before moving on: almost everyone involved with the debate community in some way has some preconceived opinion on this topic, and especially given the relevance of this topic to a lot of judges and debaters (for the most part they're either educators, students, or parents), it's generally preferable not to work against these opinions on the affirmative or the negative. This will tend to benefit the affirmative: I know of few people who actually like those standardized tests they give out in high school or think that they are really that useful.

Definitional analysis:

I honestly don't foresee any real debate over most of the terms on this topic. Nobody will really contest what qualifies as a public high school student or what a standardized exit exam. Aside from arguments over the meaning of "ought" the topic's terms tend to be intuitive. As a general note it's preferable for the negative to define a standardized exit exam in the broadest term possible. Standardized exit exams tend to fall into one of two categories, ones that have different levels of passing and failing and straight pass/fail tests. Obviously the negative's job becomes slightly easier if standardized exit exams are defined towards the latter.

As for ought, the affirmative should try to define ought in terms of desirability or advisability, whereas the negative should push for a definition that implies necessity. This is an obvious choice: by making the argument over whether it's advisable to have standardized exit exams the affirmative easily preempts stock arguments by the negative about the necessity to actually test students while opening up the offense on the affirmative side which shows that standardized exams can actually hurt a student's education. The negative should prefer necessity for the exact opposite reason. How you actually convince the judge which definition to prefer I leave up to you.

Value structures:

Obviously justice is not going to be a value premise used very much on this topic, unlike many, many previous topics. In fact, because this topic would seem to be relatively low impact, abandoning the traditional idea of using a value structure might be best. Instead, a burden that follows from the definition of "ought" that highlights exactly what your side needs to prove could work much more effectively and be more convincing. If you plan on using a standard value premise/value criterion setup, then a value relating to a "good education" with any of a myriad of measurements of educational success would work. In all honesty this topic is probably the best one to try out a non-traditional value structure in a truly competitive setting.

Affirmative Positions:

There are obviously many different positions that can be taken, but I will focus on only three, in descending order of stockness.

1. Standardized exit exams hurt the quality of student education
 - a. Components of this argument:
 - i. Standardized tests force schools to "teach to the test," leading them to cut other programs such as extracurricular programs.

- ii. Teaching to the test also mean that students sacrifice higher-order thinking skills and subjects like the sciences or social studies in favor of test prep subjects like math and reading.
 - iii. Standardized tests are most likely to hurt those students that are already at risk of dropping out, without significantly benefiting high achieving students.
 - iv. Standardized tests seem to disproportionately affect students of color.
 - b. Pros to this argument
 - i. This is possibly the most stock of all the available arguments out there, and combined with an effective definition of ought as advisability the affirmative can easily show that it is undesirable to have these exit exams because they hurt student achievement. It is also the most understandable and the most intuitive of arguments.
 - c. Cons to this argument
 - i. If you don't win a favorable definition of ought then this entire position will easily collapse. In essence, if you lose the definition, then all of your arguments become simply implementation issues that don't stop you from negating. You need to win the ought definition and you need to make sure that the evidence backing you is strong, as most studies on the impact of standardized testing is mixed.
- 2. Standardized exit exams don't accurately test an individual's knowledge
 - a. Components of this argument:
 - i. Tests oftentimes test for specific knowledge and claim that it is being used to measure general skills.
 - ii. Some people are just bad at test taking.

- iii. Having one major test tends to be a poor measure of an individual's entire high school career because of the nature of the test, and can incentivize cheating.
- b. Pros to this argument
 - i. This argument avoids being dismissed as simply a set of implementation problems by attacking the fundamental nature of the standardized test, meaning that it can be effective under any possible conceivable definition of ought. This frees up the definition debate to better defend your own arguments or to go on the attack.
- c. Cons to this argument
 - i. None of the arguments under this position are particularly strong, and thus it means that any impacts that come out of your offense will in and of themselves be much weaker, making it harder to outweigh opposing arguments. The impacts can also be tied back into the first position outlined above for greater impact, but that also risks mislabeling all of your offense as implementation issues.
- 3. Standardized testing reinforces an educational system that is inherently harmful to students
 - a. Components of this argument
 - i. A standardized test perpetrates a pretense of neutrality in the inherently biased and political setting of the school, masking the true nature and thus hindering the educational progress of students.
 - ii. Standardized testing reinforces a kind of "banking" approach to student learning, which is both dehumanizing and fosters oppression.
 - b. Pros to this argument
 - i. This argument has all of the benefits of the second position while also having much stronger impacts. Since you would

be indicting the entire current educational system you can blow the impacts way up. Additionally, it avoids any possibility of being classified as an implementation issue because it criticizes the entirety of the educational system.

c. Cons to this argument

- i. Unless you read and understand the relevant literature (critical pedagogy, Freire, etc.) these arguments are easy to misconstrue or to misrepresent. As a result, they are best used with caution. Additionally, such arguments might not be very convincing to lay judges.

Negative Positions:

Like the affirmative side, I will only focus on a few positions in descending order of stockness.

1. Standardized tests are necessary because they are the only possible objective measure of student's learning

a. Components of this argument

- i. Schools vary greatly when it comes to academic quality, meaning that only a standardized exit exam can effectively measure if a student has learned what he needs.
- ii. Standardized exit exams are the only way to compare schools in a direct, objective measure.
- iii. Only exams necessary to graduate can ensure that students will actually attempt to learn anything.

b. Pros to this argument

- i. This is the most stock and straightforward argument. Most proponents of standardized tests will be advancing this argument, making it easy to find evidence. Moreover, unlike on the aff, either definition of ought actually can work with this stock argument, since if you can prove that it's necessary, then it obviously is desirable.

- c. Cons to this argument
 - i. Any alternatives in any form will easily take away all of your offense. These alternatives can come in two forms: firstly, a better alternative to certify students before graduation. Secondly, the affirmative can simply advocate for a standardized test whose passing isn't necessary to graduate (for example the SATs), which captures all of the benefits of measuring and accountability with none of the problems of having it being necessary, drastically narrowing your ground.
- 2. Standardized exit exams increase the value of the education received by students
 - a. Components of this argument
 - i. Individual diplomas are perceived as better if high school students are required to take exit exams because it verifies that there is a basic objective set of skills that were learned by those students.
 - ii. Exit exams thus increase the value of the degrees earned by students.
 - b. Pros to this argument
 - i. Honestly the only benefit to this position is that it's unexpected. It's better to combine this argument with another stronger position.
 - c. Cons to this argument
 - i. Not only is it low impact, but it's also dubious at best. It requires reliance on not so much philosophical but economic arguments, meaning that you would have to find empirical evidence to back this up, which is hard to do.

Concluding thoughts:

This topic seems to be relatively balanced compared to some other topics in recent memory, but unfortunately it seems to be narrower than other possible

topics. As a result, expect many of the same arguments to be constantly repeated. In this sense, the topic is perfect for September/October in order to act as an introduction to novices and also as refresher for debaters just coming back from summer and camp. To that extent it will be a much more productive use of your time to simply research further and have a deeper knowledge of this topic than to come up with new positions or new arguments. Running just the stock arguments and then following that up with a lot of evidence and knowledge of the topic will lead to a lot of effective wins and will likely set you up for a good year.

With that being said this is not to discourage unique or critical positions. Indeed, there is an entire literature specifically dedicated to critical pedagogy, allowing you to run K's to your heart's content. However, just remember that pretty much all other critical arguments have to be filtered through critical educational theory, as it sets the framework by which other schools of critical thought (feminism, Marxism, etc.) can be applied to criticism of traditional education. Without that kind of filter your arguments will always be outweighed because your opponent can always just claim that regardless of the criticism the benefits of a better educational system outweigh on this topic specifically.

This topic also lends itself well towards affirmative kritiks, especially since the negative is given the burden of defending the status quo. In short, this should be a fun topic, both because it explores a relatively untouched topic in debate and because the sides will be as well balanced as a resolution can allow. Aside from that I wish you all the best of luck on this topic.

Affirmative Evidence

Exit Exams and Academic Achievement:

A standardized testing environment stunts the brain's potential to grow

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf> Founder of Educator Round Table.

By age 9 or so, young people have the physical structure—the hardware, if you will—of their brain in place. Over the next ten to twelve years it is crucial that they actively utilize different brain functions—develop the software—in order for it to reach its maximum potential.³⁶ Structured complexity in the classroom, an enriched array of choices and modes of assessment, varied social groupings all contribute to growing the brain in particularly fruitful ways. And so does creating an environment in which adequate time, physical activity and low stress levels are baseline considerations.³⁷⁻³⁸ Similarly, the aesthetic appreciation found in music and the arts as well as more contemplative activities like spirituality and compassion are not things that happen without schools making them a priority, or at least a possibility. ³⁹All of these are currently being shunted aside in our mad rush to increase test scores. As a result, we are in danger of producing a generation of learners who cannot critically think, appreciate the arts, nor marvel at the profound mysteries of our universe.

High stakes exams do not encourage students to work harder.

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf> Founder of Educator Round Table.

Astoundingly, there is no research data showing that such “high-stakes” environments actually work to improve effort, achievement or scholarship. None.¹⁴ Nor have long-standing college-entrance exams, like the SAT and ACT, shown any significant change in student achievement over the last decade.¹⁵ In fact, in 2006, they experienced their biggest decline in 31 years.¹⁶ Nor do international comparison exams like TIMMS¹⁷ or national comparative tests like the NAEP¹⁸ show much improvement amongst the body of American students. In other words, if the claim is that high stakes exams are somehow improving “student achievement”, it is not showing up in numbers across class cohorts.

Statistical evidence shows exit exams do not make students work harder

‘RESTORING VALUE’ TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D.

University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

The most contentious issue around exit exams concerns whether the exams increase dropout rates. While this might seem an obvious outcome, dropout rates might decrease if students were motivated to work more seriously, or, they might at least remain stable if the same students dropped out regardless of the exam. Although it’s relatively clear that the early wave of exit exams did not affect dropout rates significantly, these were usually minimum competency exams with low demands. In recent years, however, a lively debate has grown up around the methodological issues involved in measuring dropout and completion rates accurately and then setting up appropriate statistical models. Some of the material emerging from the debate has offered a good deal of evidence reinforcing the conclusion that exit exams make no difference.⁵⁵ However, an important, recent article contradicts that evidence. Based on the most careful calculation of graduation rates and the longest time span, this study concluded that exit exams—and particularly the more difficult exams—did reduce high school completion rates, by about 2.1 percentage points.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the negative effects of exams were larger in states with higher rates of poverty and with more racially and ethnically diverse student populations. This conclusion reinforces results from other studies indicating that test score results and passing rates vary substantially by race, ethnicity, and income.⁵⁷ Proponents of higher standards might be willing to accept higher dropout rates as part of the presumed trade-off between equality and quality, or equity and effectiveness, though no one has been so crass as to admit this. But the hope that exit exams might increase standards without decreasing completion and equity has now been seriously challenged. Certainly no one has suggested that exit exams have

enhanced completion rates, so the argument that they might “pull up” students—
by encouraging them to take harder courses and so be more likely to graduate—
appears totally unfounded.

Exit Exams Increase the Drop-Out Rate:

Griffen and Heidor study shows high achieving students who do not pass exit exams are more likely to give up

Brian A. Jacob. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis Summer 2001, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 99-121 Getting Tough? The Impact of High School Graduation Exams John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Griffen and Heidor (1996) provide a more rigorous and thorough examination of the relationship between performance on graduation exams and school leaving. Drawing on a cross section of more than 76,000 secondary school students in Florida during 1990-91, they find that failure on the examination significantly increases the probability of leaving school, but only for students who were doing well academically (based on a measure of high school GPA). Interestingly, they found no significant difference in dropout rates between low-achieving students who passed and those who failed the exam.

Catterall and MacMillan, Widaman, Hemsley study shows those who fail exit exams are more likely to give up

Brian A. Jacob. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis Summer 2001, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 99-121 Getting Tough? The Impact of High School Graduation Exams John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Catterall (1989) found that students who initially fail high school graduation tests are significantly more likely to express doubts about their chances of finishing school, even after controlling for earlier grade retention, academic performance, peer culture, and family background. Other studies have focused on the relationship between actual performance on a graduation exam and subsequent school leaving. MacMillan, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) studied approximately 1,200 students in California, most of whom were classified as learning disabled or exhibited low achievement levels. They found that failure on the graduation exam was associated with a substantially higher likelihood of dropping out for learning disabled and low-achieving students, and a slightly higher chance of leaving school for the control group.

Exit exams do not help and only doom students already behind from before high school

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But beyond asserting that more rigorous standards must exist for all students, the standard-bearers fail to address the issues of equity at all. How, for example, is it possible to get ninth graders reading at the fifth- or sixth-grade level to analyze "rigorous texts"? How are students who have not mastered simple fractions going to complete Algebra II? There are answers to these questions, including interventions like ninth-grade academies, fundamental improvements in instruction, and ways of restructuring high schools to increase motivation and engagement, but they are difficult to implement and their effectiveness is uncertain. Furthermore, many interventions must begin much earlier than high school. Dropping out of school has often been viewed as a developmental process that begins in the elementary grades; to avoid the most egregious betrayals of any standards system requires policies attending to support and intervention in the earliest years of schooling. Yet there is not even a whisper of such policies anywhere in the texts promoting standards in high schools. Again and again and again, these authors call for higher standards, but they fail to show how they can be achieved.

Exit Exams are Poor Assessments:

Political necessity makes exit exams too easy to be useful

State High School Exit Examinations and Postsecondary Labor Market Outcomes. John Robert Warren University of Minnesota, Eric Grodsky University of California at Davis, Jennifer C. Lee Indiana University. *Sociology of Education* Issue 81, January 2008

Even in states with more difficult HSEEs, the political realities are such that policymakers are hesitant to fail large percentages of students on their examinations or to withhold diplomas from a large number of would-be graduates. Consequently, states tend to lower passing thresholds—regardless of the level of academic skills being assessed—to yield politically acceptable passing rates. Doing so may severely compromise the value of state HSEE policies as signals of the productive capacity of individuals or groups for employers. If state HSEEs set the threshold for passage at a higher level and thus prevented a much larger number of lower-achieving students from obtaining diplomas, we might observe increased labor market returns to the completion of high school.

Schools can exempt groups of students and thus nullify the purpose of exit exams

High School Exit Examinations and High School Dropout in Texas and Florida, 1971-2000 Author(s): John Robert Warren and Krista N. Jenkins Source: Sociology of Education, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 122-143

Finally, it may be that the effect of high school exit examinations on dropout is muted by local schools' and districts' capacity to decide which students are exempt from taking the exit examinations. Florida, Texas, and other states have established policies to allow exemptions or special accommodations for students with disabilities and for students with limited English proficiency. Under these policies, schools and school districts decide which students meet the state definitions of disability or limited English proficiency. As we discussed earlier, however, principals and school district administrators are under enormous pressure to raise pass rates on statewide high school exit examinations. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that principals and administrators use their ability to exempt students to their advantage, but little solid empirical research. To give a rough sense of the potential magnitude of the issue, Figure 3 reports the ratio of the actual number of first-time exit examination takers in Texas and Florida to the number of students who were eligible to take the examination in each state and in each year¹⁷, as estimated in both the CPS data and the Common Core of Data (CCD). Figure 3 shows that with the exception of two data points in the CPS analyses, the percentage of eligible students who took the examination appears to be substantially lower than 100 percent. In most years, the figure is about 80 percent in Florida and 90 percent in Texas; in neither state does there appear to be an obvious trend upward or downward. If nothing else, Figure 3 implies that a substantial number of students are exempted from state exit examinations in both Florida and Texas each year. This finding at least raises the possibility that schools and districts are exempting students who are most at risk of failing exit

examinations-and thereby muting the impact of state exit examinations on dropout

Inflexible Exit exam requirements increase the tendency for error

Test-Based Accountability: The Promise and the Perils. Tom Loveless. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2005.1 (2005) 7-45

A more public flaw of accountability systems is the misidentification of failing schools and students, in which case states invoke unwarranted sanctions. Incentives that are applied haphazardly cannot be expected to work properly. Several embarrassing mistakes have been reported in the press. Officials in New York City incorrectly required nine thousand students to attend summer school in 1999 before discovering that the students' test score data were flawed.²⁰ In June 2000 Minnesota denied diplomas to fifty-four high school seniors whose high school exit exams had been incorrectly scored.²¹ **[End Page 12]** Maryland postponed release of its 2001 test results when some schools registered implausibly large swings in test scores.²² These mistakes are rare and can be attributed to human error, but with a student's future or a school's reputation on the line, they undermine the public's perception of accountability systems as fair and accurate.

Standardized tests promote memorization and lack real connection to student's lives.

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf>. Founder of Educator Round Table.

Standardized tests, typically multiple-choice and lacking in breadth and depth, tend to measure low-order thinking skills, the kind of short-sequence logic operations which are routine and involve immediate recall of discrete but obvious facts. There are two problems here: first, these types of questions are often abstract, with no connection to a student's life and are therefore inherently uninteresting and unable to pierce through to their real-world concerns. We know, or should, that connection to a student's identity is one of the surest ways we can bring him or her into the world of academia.³¹ In a word, students find these problems unimportant and useless, and many don't care enough to put forward a good effort.

Teachers have little to no influence in shaping exit tests

Brian A. Jacob. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis Summer 2001, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 99-121 Getting Tough? The Impact of High School Graduation Exams John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Individual school personnel generally have little input in statewide policy decisions. Moreover, such mandates are rarely accompanied by significant training, materials, or financial resources. On the other hand, if an individual school decides to adopt this type of policy, it is likely that the teachers have had at least some input in shaping the program. Similarly, district policies are more likely to come with resources to support their implementation. However, district or

school policies are more likely to be subject to exceptions and changes that could dilute the impact of the program.

Exit Exams Decrease the Quality of Teaching:

Exit exams prevent teachers from doing their jobs

How have High School Exit Exams changed our schools? Some perspectives from Virginia and Maryland CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY | JUNE 2005

Teachers also reported making changes in instructional practices, such as spending less class time in labs and hands-on instruction. One teacher said, “We take the fun stuff out.” The pace of instruction has changed as well. Many teachers reported sometimes leaving behind students who haven’t gotten a concept and moving on to another topic to “stay on pace with the pacing guide” for the class. As one teacher explained, “There are pacing guides that tell you approximately where you should be at a certain time. Sometimes you have to move on.” Many teachers also reported taking content out of the curriculum to make time to teach test-taking skills. Finally several teachers reported that they feel pressured by the district to focus on planning lessons and collecting evidence that SOLs have been covered rather than teaching. One teacher said, “Every day we have to write down what SOL objectives we covered to cover ourselves if the tests come back bad.”

High school exit exams undermine effective teaching

The Effect of High School Graduation Exams on SAT Scores (Press Edit).

Gregory J. Marchant and Sharon E. Paulson. Ball State University March, 2004.

Gifted Child Today.

Finding that graduation examination requirements were negatively related to SAT scores when controlling for demographics was the major result of this study, supporting the instructional concerns expressed by critics of high stakes testing. Research repeatedly yields two findings related to instruction and high stakes testing: teachers tend to narrow the scope of their curriculum to that which is tested, and they tend to abandon more innovative teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and creative projects in favor of more traditional lecture and recitation (e.g., Brown, 1992, 1993; Romberg, Zarinnia, & Williams, 1989). The pressure to improve student scores compels some teachers to teach-to-the-test (Smith, 1991). High stakes testing also seems to encourage the use of instructional approaches and materials that resemble the tests used (Rottenberg & Smith, 1990). Because the nature of items on the SAT, as a “reasoning” test, can look very different than those of a typical achievement test; focus and preparation for the achievement test are unlikely to transfer. Rituals of giving multiple-choice quizzes and providing test preparation often take the place of “normal” instruction when high stakes tests are a factor. Teachers exploring instructional practices informed by current views of learning and supported by cognitive psychology that seek deeper understanding and critical thinking may find those techniques, and even those goals, at odds with the drill and practice suggested by the broad rather superficial coverage typical of schools with graduation exams (Marchant, 2004). High stakes examinations have been found to be a major factor in discouraging teachers from using strategies that promote enquiry and active learning, and this “impoverishment” influences the language of classroom discourse (Wideen, O’Shea, Pye, & Ivany, 1997). Therefore, as more flexible, responsive, innovative student-based instructional approaches are

abandoned in favor of achievement test preparation, the ability to reason verbally and mathematically, as reflected by SAT scores, may suffer.

Exit Exams and the Quality of the Curriculum/Teaching to the Test:

Exit exams dumb down the curriculum

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

In fact, the most obvious problem with existing exit exams is that, by and large, they do not impose high standards. The Achieve report, *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?*, has determined that most states include questions at the 7th and 8th grade material for math, and at the 8th and 9th grade level for English; it complained that “these exams will need to be strengthened over time to better measure the knowledge and skills high school graduates need to success in the real world.”⁵⁰ “Strengthening” is defined as including more challenging content, more challenging questions, and higher cut scores—that is, as yet another call for test and course rigor.⁵¹ Moreover, there’s even some evidence that high schools may detour from their conventional curricula to provide preparation time for exit exams: in Austin, Texas, students in honors and AP classes had to participate in exam prep courses, and one student complained that “it hinders upper-level classes . . . you are holding some students back and not pushing some students forward.”⁵² So some exit exams may actually contribute to dumbing down the curriculum.

Standardized exit exams harmfully limit the curriculum, undermining important skills

High-Stakes Testing and Students: Stopping or Perpetuating a Cycle of Failure?
Author(s): Catherine Horn Source: Theory into Practice, Vol. 42, No. 1, The Impact of High-Stakes Testing (Winter, 2003), pp. 30-41

Comparing these nontested ELA standards to the 21st century competencies laid out previously, it is interesting to note that almost all of these harder to measure skills are viewed as no less necessary for jobs in the new millennium. For as much as the new labor market will need to have the ability to read and write, these workers will also need to work collectively, utilize technology, and be able to present ideas orally (to name a few). Similarly, while many of the mathematics standards are more easily and readily tested, there still remain less easily measured skills that are important in the emerging labor market but not assessed (e.g., an ability to express mathematical concepts clearly to a variety of audiences). At best, the high-stakes MCAS tests are ensuring proficiency in only a subset of skills de-fined as essential for work in the new millennium. At worst, the MCAS assessments may be leading to the underpreparation of students for the 21st century workforce.

Empirical evidence suggests that teachers are narrowing the curriculum to the test

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In addition, limited evidence from a few districts suggests that teachers are increasingly using instructional guides aligned to the tests, teaching test-taking strategies, and otherwise retreating from broader instructional experiences like reading longer pieces of literature, going into some subjects in depth, or teaching mathematical problem-solving.⁵³ In the Austin case study, two typical exit exam responses emerged: in schools serving higher-performing students likely to pass the exam, little changed; in schools serving low-performing students, however, exam requirements distorted many aspects of the curriculum. (These results are consistent with how schools have responded both to state accountability systems and to No Child Left Behind.) For failing students, then, the help available substitutes drill in a narrow range of basic skills for the broader education and deeper understanding that exams are supposed to help promote. How this will help students complete in the global economy remains unclear. Again, these exit exams seem to dumb down the curriculum, rather than increasing meaningful learning as advocates intend.

Standardized exit exams cause teachers to “teach to the test” instead of delving deep into specific subjects

Center on Education Policy. State High School Exams: A Challenging Year. 2006. http://hsee.umn.edu/hsee_documentation/allstates_cep2006.pdf

Teachers in both districts have revised their instruction to emphasize topics and skills likely to be tested and to spend more time reviewing information and test-taking skills, especially as testing time approaches. They have also revised in-class assessments to more closely resemble the format and substance of exit exams.] Teachers and administrators reported that the benefits of exit exams include encouraging educators and others to talk about student performance, promoting greater cooperation among teachers (including regular education and special education teachers), and making resistant teachers actually adhere to the curriculum. [The drawbacks brought up in both districts include a decreased emphasis on higher-level skills, less time for valuable activities and subjects not covered on the exit exam, and the push to cover more content at the expense of delving deeper into a particular subject area.

Standardized testing encourages shallow learning

Alfie Kohn. Standardized Testing and Its Victims. September 2000. Education Week. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/staiv.htm> Writes and speaks widely on human behavior, education, and parenting. The author of eleven books and scores of articles, he lectures at education conferences and universities as well as to parent groups and corporations.

In a study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology, elementary school students were classified as "actively" engaged in learning if they asked questions of themselves while they read and tried to connect what they were doing to past learning; and as "superficially" engaged if they just copied down answers, guessed a lot, and skipped the hard parts. It turned out that high scores on both the CTBS and the MAT were more likely to be found among students who exhibited the superficial approach to learning. Similar findings have emerged from studies of middle school students (also using the CTBS) and high school students (using the other SAT, the college-admission exam). To be sure, there are plenty of students who think deeply and score well on tests—and plenty of students who do neither. But, as a rule, it appears that standardized-test results are positively correlated with a shallow approach to learning.

Exit exams in practice contribute to lower standards

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Recent legislation has forced the translation of rhetoric into practice. Most states have increased their graduation requirements, and half the states have adopted exit exams. With very few exceptions, both graduation requirements and exit exams replicate the conventional academic curriculum of the late nineteenth century. In addition, most state exams are written at the seventh- to ninth-grade levels—not at what proponents would label as high standards. The conventional response to student failure has been to provide remediation, an approach that also undermines learning beyond basic skill levels and narrows the curriculum to a few tested subjects, and which may have even contributed to lowering standards and reducing graduation rates.

Threats are not good motivation

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The answer from the American Diploma Project is in effect a simple faith in the behaviorist power of tests to force teachers and students to comply with new requirements. That is, the ADP proposal simply assumes that the threat of withholding a diploma will make students and teachers work harder. Unfortunately, threats of punishment don't work well as motivation: modern businesses have largely abandoned the strategy, which is particularly inappropriate to motivate individuals to do intrinsically uninteresting work¹⁷ —the type of work most often found in high schools, as student testimony shows.¹⁸ And, when high schools attempt to raise pass rates with skill-and-drill remedial routines geared narrowly to the test, conditions that nurture high levels of motivation and engagement are eliminated.¹⁹ The basic assumptions of the American Diploma Project violate much of what we know about student behavior.

Exit Exams Decrease the Quality of Schools and Administrative Choices:

Exit exams promote retaining students unnecessarily to inflate scores

Test-Based Accountability: The Promise and the Perils. Tom Loveless. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2005.1 (2005) 7-45

A related issue involves schools' practice of removing low achievers from the pool of tested students, either by retaining them in a lower grade, in order to inflate test scores in a later grade that is monitored by the state, or by placing students in special education or limited-English programs, to exempt them from testing. These are efforts to circumvent accountability systems. Walter Haney has charged that after Texas implemented a high school exit exam in 1991, schools began retaining low-achieving students in the ninth grade to keep them out of the tenth grade, the first year students take the exam and results are publicly reported.¹⁷ Linda McNeil also uncovered evidence of this in case studies of schools in Texas, which, being the home of so many education officials in the Bush administration, is a state that has received intense scrutiny.¹⁸ Scant empirical evidence has been produced to document the problem nationally. The difficulty in researching these phenomena is that they predate accountability systems and—certainly in the case of placement in special education and limited-English programs—may occur both legitimately and illegitimately. Changes in the identification rates of special programs can be driven by many factors that are difficult to collect data on or to pin down with school records. After examining these issues, a research team from the Rand Corporation has concluded that "the extent to which these negative effects occurred and the factors that may influence their occurrence remain uncertain, but there is a clear need for further monitoring of these effects and research on them."¹⁹

Exit exams cause lower performing students to miss out on a full educational experience

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A second problem is that what states and schools do with students who have failed initial stages of exams is universally described as “remediation,” which usually refers to drills on narrowly-defined and test-driven skills. Such an approach may help students pass a low-level test, of course, and graduating instead of dropping out is certainly in their interests as well as in those of their teachers, principals, and districts. But, especially since failing students are often pulled out of other classes in order to attend remedial courses, this also means that they miss a broader range of subjects (including “core” subjects potentially necessary for college admission).

Students falling behind starts before high school, thus exit exams cause a double bind for states

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A final problem is that providing remedial help in grades 10, 11, and 12 is surely the proverbial “too little, too late.” A student’s performance in one grade powerfully influences performance in subsequent years, so it take several years of sustained efforts to move a student’s performance from a low level to one sufficient to pass an exit exam.⁵⁴ This means that efforts to improve exam performance should start at least in middle school, and perhaps even in elementary school, to ensure that all students acquire basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Overall, states are caught in an inescapable dilemma. If they set exit exam standards high, incorporating 11th and 12th grade material, then pass rates will be low and states will have to confront the expensive and difficult challenge of helping all students meet high standards, throughout the middle and even elementary school years. If they set standards low, then most students will pass, and states can hope that short remedial programs at the last minute will pull most of the remaining students through. But this tactic defeats the purpose of exit exams, since it neither maintains high standards nor provides low-performing students with powerful educational experiences. Under these conditions, exit exams become symbolic rather than strategic.

Exit Exams Undermines the Purpose of Education:

Standardized testing destroys the purpose of education.

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf> Founder of Educator Round Table.

Teaching in a standardized testing environment encourages lousy teaching techniques—memorization, drill-and-kill, rote learning—and results in the kind of shallow, fleeting and compartmentalized knowledge that is ineffective and prone to turn children off from school.] We have known this for over five decades— why would we go back to a kind of instructional practice that never worked in the first place? 4. Learning is natural and inherently valued. As mentioned above, a standardized classroom results in poor pedagogy that gets the learning equation backward. Learning should be pursued for its intrinsic value, not because someone is forcing one to learn. Why do students put in hours and hours rehearsing for musical concerts, plays or practicing sports? Because, in fact, they see intrinsic value in those activities; in a word, they choose to pursue them. The same could and should be true for our academic subjects if and when we focus on giving students choices and responsibility for designing a learning plan. Course work should have much greater relevance to a student, as well as a specific and practical application beyond school. Mostly this means making explicit the connection between a given subject and a student’s life— contextualizing it, bringing it home personally, giving them and their community a stake in seeing that learning matters.³⁵ Once students are hooked on learning— not for reward or avoiding punishment—they will do far more for themselves and their intellectual development than we could ever imagine. Unfortunately, in the current environment, students are told repeatedly: the reason they need to spend

hours learning some abstract, disconnected operation or set of facts is that it will someday be on an exam.

Standardized testing undermines unique American Educational values

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf> Founder of Educator Round Table.

At its core, the high-stakes standardized testing movement is asking students not only to not think for themselves, but to passively accept that all knowledge is controlled by authority. That you exist only as an individual, not as part of some larger social whole, and that you will be successful or fail based upon your individual ability to do exactly what others expect you to. If you step outside of that and try to do something based upon conviction, creativity or critical insight, your academic record along with a raft of social opportunities will be damaged. In fully embracing a high-stakes standardized testing regime, we are subverting a substantial part of what makes America unique and productive: our ingenuity, our self-reliance, our faith that we make a better tomorrow through creativity and collaboration, not conforming to others' ideas about what we ought to know or be able to do. Instead, we are being asked to stay passively in our chair and make a selection from answers provided, obey all commands and regulations—no matter how punitive, ridiculous or restrictive—blithely accept the accuracy, fairness and lack of transparency surrounding the exams, and voice not a single word in opposition to the entire noxious enterprise.

Education via memorization causes education to be an act of depositing, causing people to lose their humanity, eroding creativity and true knowledge.

Paulo Faure. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum Publishing Company in 1970. Theorist of critical pedagogy.

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity. The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power. “Four times four is sixteenth the capital of Para is Belem.” The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of “capital” in the affirmation “the capital of Para is Belem”, that is, what Belem means for Para and what para means for Brazil. Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis,

it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.]

Exit Exams and Inequality and Discrimination:

Standardized testing history is racist

Jacqueline Fleming. Affirmative action and standardized test scores. *Journal of Negro Education*, The, Winter 2000. Psychologist and author and retention specialist at Texas Southern University in Houston.

The standardized testing movement has a racist history in both Europe and the United States (Hirsch, 1981). Standardized tests have been used to impede the social progress of Africans and African Americans for at least two centuries. Gould (1996) provides a good, if even blood-curdling, account of early attempts to measure mental capacities in such a way that Blacks would be assured a spot at the bottom of the scale. He chronicles efforts to measure cranial capacity, size and weight of the brain, number of convolutions of the brain, ratio of the distance from front to back of the brain, placement of the foramen magnum (the hole in the base of the skull), intelligence in general, and the G-factor (an estimate of general intelligence derived from factor analysis) in particular—concluding that all these measurements have been tainted by historical social prejudices. He reanalyzed most of the data on which many of the "scientific" racist assumptions of Black inferiority have been based, and upon taking the most obvious corrections into account (e.g., sex of the skeleton, unreliability of the measuring instrument, or testing conditions), he found no significant racial differences in intelligence. Indeed, the point emphasized throughout his treatise is that intelligence is an abstract concept, defined by a series of scores on a set of measurements, then reified—that is, elevated to the level of a biological attribute and deemed to have its antecedents in the brain. In reality, he concludes, the concept is not at all rooted in biology but rather in the set of measurements chosen as the determinants of intelligence, and those determinants are by and

large those on which Europeans, and specifically elite Europeans, excel. When the test results have not conformed to social prejudice-that is, when Blacks did not perform poorly or as poorly as intended-the tests typically were altered and the incongruous theories discarded. One of the by-products of this dubious history is a general awareness among African Americans, even if they do not know all the details, that standardized tests have been used against them. Often, African Americans take this awareness into the testing situation.

Statistics for group disparity in standardized tests

Center on Education Policy. State High School Exams: A Challenging Year.

2006. http://hsee.umn.edu/hsee_documentation/allstates_cep2006.pdf

The gaps in pass rates between African American and white students continue to be very large, averaging 20 to 30 percentage points in most states. In reading/English language arts, the disparities between black and white students range from a 5 percentage point gap in Georgia to a 37-point gap in Florida. Gaps in math pass rates vary from a 9 percentage point gap in Mississippi to a 46-point gap in Minnesota. The gaps between white and Latino students are similar, though somewhat smaller on average. For Latino students, gaps in reading/ELA range from 9 percentage points in Tennessee to 29 percentage points in Arizona. The disparities in math pass rates for Latino students vary from a low of 2 percentage points in Mississippi to a high of 35 points in Minnesota.

Standardized exams further the inequality between social groups.

Peter Henry. The Case Against Standardized Testing. 2007. Minnesota English Journal. <http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej07/3Henry.pdf> Founder of Educator Round Table.

The oft-stated purpose of NCLB is to narrow the achievement gap between whites and students of color. Yet, we know, and have known for a long time, that the most reliable predictor of a student's standardized test score is the square-footage of their principal residence.⁴⁰ In other words, students of affluent families almost universally score higher on exams than do students in under-privileged homes. Researchers have found that by the age of six, children in affluent families have been exposed to fully 2 million more words than have been children in more trying circumstances.⁴¹ They are more likely to have been read to regularly, engaged in enrichment activities like travel and museums and also to have had access to adequate nutrition and health-care. Is it any wonder that there is a substantial achievement gap when there is a veritable gulf of difference between the haves and the have-nots in America? (I don't even understand why we are surprised by this.) But to then take the one reliable instrument which has always privileged well-to-do students and make it the basis of comparison and academic achievement for every kid in America is simply to lock in place existing inequities. Poor children are, by far, more likely to drop out, have a stressful home-life, get suspended, repeatedly move and change schools, run afoul of the law and act out during class.⁴² They are also least likely to be interested in or motivated by abstract questions or the need to score highly on an instrument far removed from their personal experience. We are not closing the achievement gap under NCLB as major research studies have shown,⁴³ but, rather, we are confirming and institutionalizing at the level of policy how real and profound are the differences between rich and poor.

**States usually leave schools to cope with exit exam costs, thus further
disadvantaging poorer areas**

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC
AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D.
University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of
California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

However, many of these costs are borne by districts or schools themselves,
since only 14 of the 25 states with exit exams provided additional support. In a
sub-study of Indiana, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, schools and districts bore
as much as 96% of exam-related costs (largely for remediation). This analysis
illustrates two problems: First, again, is that states have imposed test
requirements without increasing the capacities of districts and schools to meet
these requirements. Indeed, if districts and schools with high proportions of low-
performing students also have fewer fiscal resources, those with the greatest
need for enhanced capacity have the greatest unfunded demand.

Large disparities between groups exist on standardized testing

High-Stakes Testing and Students: Stopping or Perpetuating a Cycle of Failure?

Author(s): Catherine Horn Source: Theory into Practice, Vol. 42, No. 1, The Impact of High-Stakes Testing (Winter, 2003), pp. 30-41

Taken as a whole, the Massachusetts and North Carolina results suggest that non-White, non-Asian students are among the groups most affected by this type of high-stakes testing. The 10th grade results from the MCAS ELA and mathematics exams show that minority, limited English proficient, and disabled students will be deeply impacted by the upcoming diploma sanction. As many as half of African Americans and Hispanics currently in the class of 2003 may not graduate because of test scores. Up to 84% of limited English proficient students also may not receive a diploma. In North Carolina, African American and Hispanic students are being retained in grade because of test scores at almost 4 times the rate of White and Asian students

Standards-Based Education Reform Fails:

Standards based reform entrenches the current system's outdated origins

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

At the same time, there are many other conceptions of what's wrong with the high school and many other goals for its transformation, as we suggested in our Introduction. Not surprisingly, the movement for standards threatens to exacerbate other problems and impede efforts to solve them. At times, the proposed solution even reinforces an identified problem. Consider, for example, the critique that the high school is a vestige, an industrial-era institution in the twenty-first century, which appears to mean that it has changed little in terms of content and structure. Contemporary curriculum looks remarkably similar to the conventional college prep curriculum approved by the Committee of Ten in 1893, and the typical structure of short periods of subject study (Carnegie units) still occur in a fall-through-spring academic year developed in the agrarian nineteenth century. And yet, the recommendations of Ready or Not and a focus on high school graduation requirements simply reinforce this traditional approach to the high school, as detailed above. Meanwhile, alternative visions—for example, theme-based curricula, or new integration of academic and occupational education, or service learning or internship opportunities—are actively thwarted by the standard academic curriculum and its codification in academic course requirements. For all its criticism of high schools as outdated, the standards movement—the current push to place added rigor and higher standards behind the high school diploma—is less a reform than a reaffirmation of an older ideal,

maintaining the power of the late nineteenth century model and making any other, more substantive reforms more difficult.

Standards based reforms decrease curricular relevance

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The standards movement also fails on the criterion of “relevance,” another goal of many high school reformers. Relevance is itself often defined narrowly in vocational terms, and one might think that manifestos calling for better preparation for “postsecondary education and work” would offer proposals scoring high on relevance. But once the workplace rhetoric disappears from these reports and proposals move on to promoting graduation standards and exit exams, “relevance” means simply getting into postsecondary education, the conventional goal of the college track. Of course it would be an advance if high school students better understood the connection between high school courses and college requirements, avoiding the current widespread problem of seniors realizing they have not taken appropriate courses only when they apply for college admission. But this still leaves the intrinsic importance of high school study unclear, where there are no good answers to the question “Why do I need to know this?”—only the pathetic refrain “It will help you get into college.” Any broader conception of relevance—high school as preparation for all aspects of life, for active participation as workers, political agents, community participants, family members, participants in the social and cultural life of the nation—can only be systematically squeezed out of the high school by the standards movement and its narrow emphasis on college preparation.

Standards based reforms make school more boring, thus decreasing student interest and achievement

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

Finally, still other reformers have challenged the high school to become more intrinsically interesting, since so many students report being bored throughout their high school years. The standards movement does nothing at all to respond to this critique. Instead, by eliminating the possibilities of anything but the conventional college track, it leads to a narrow menu of conventional academic coursework for all students, explicitly adopting the existing college prep curriculum as the default approach to "College for All." And, it fails to offer any thoughts on how to incorporate more intrinsically motivating instruction with such strategies as closer adult-student relationships, greater autonomy, opportunities to construct personal meaning in a well-structured environment with clear purposes, multiple paths to competence, and a deeper understating of educational and life options.⁶¹ The standards movement leaves unchanged one of the most damning critiques of the high school: that all too many students regard it as a chore and a bore, distinctly secondary in their priorities to their social and cultural lives, recalling Paul Goodman's critique of five decades ago: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

More rigorous standards overlook the much more needed higher order skill set

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Rigor as levels of sophistication: Much less often—and virtually nowhere in the commission reports—rigor refers to a presumed hierarchy of competencies. For instance, in reading, decoding has in the past been deemed necessary before comprehension; the ability to make inferences deemed more sophisticated; and making analytic judgments about texts deemed still more advanced. In math, manipulation of numbers is a “basic” skill, as is the mastery of fractions, decimals, and other transformations of numbers; but the development of number sense or mathematical sense-making—the ability to draw information from a table of data, or to transform numbers into other, more illuminating numbers—is a competence that most adult Americans seem to lack, even if they have progressed through the apparently greater content rigor of Algebra I and II.²⁶ Many students who can regurgitate “How a Bill Becomes a Law” cannot participate in political debates; scientists seem to delight in showing that even graduate science students still retain primitive or “folk” conceptions of scientific mechanisms. So test and content rigor, with the raw materials of academic courses, cannot guarantee greater sophistication in thinking. This is often referred to as “higher-order skills,” as contrasted with “basic skills,” and many reports allied with the Education Gospel have called for such skills — conceptualization, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, communications to different audiences²⁷ —to be incorporated into schools. But there’s little mention of such standards in these reports, perhaps because in a world defined by what can be tested, there are still not general ways of assessing higher-order abilities across the entire school population.

US system does not implement standardized credentials well

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D.

University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

But here a different problem arises. One is that neither group has any conception of how diplomas and credentials work. In our conception, diplomas and credentials work when they integrate the demands of colleges, employers, or others requiring certain competencies; the expectations of education providers, including teachers; and the expectations of students.²³ This means that either employers or postsecondary institutions need to incorporate these new diplomas and assessments into their hiring or admissions requirements. But how this will happen, when four-year colleges already have admissions procedures requiring existing tests and when employers already rely on various existing diplomas, is unclear. The formalized credentials in European countries are often (as in the German-speaking countries) created by tripartite groups incorporating employers, unions, and education providers. However, the U.S. has (except in the case of licensed occupations) relied mostly on "informal" credentials like the high school diploma and the baccalaureate degree, established and recognized by long practice and with clear consequences for employment even if not formally structured. Fostering such alignment in the U.S. would involve enormous effort, and require much greater participation of employers, of (now poorly organized) labor representatives, and of educators. The prognosis for doing so is not good; the utter failure of the National Skills Standards Board to set up sector-specific skill standards in the 1990s²⁴ suggests some of the many difficulties of the task. Furthermore, ADP wants colleges and universities to recognize its higher standards in admissions procedures, a plan with other complications. A high proportion of postsecondary education takes place in community colleges, which

pride themselves on their inclusive admissions policies, and in non-selective institutions, which also accept virtually all applicants. ADP's higher standards would therefore obviously be irrelevant in the many institutions that specialize in accommodating relatively poorly prepared students. Thus, the possibility that many employers or postsecondary institutions will adopt ADP's higher standards seems remote. Instead, teachers and leaders in high schools would have to lead this charge—despite the inconvenient fact that these manifestos are stone silent on the question of how exactly the high school is to change to allow for such leadership.

The nature of the education system makes accountability based reform unlikely to be done right

Test-Based Accountability: The Promise and the Perils. Tom Loveless. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2005.1 (2005) 7-45

Frederick M. Hess has pointed out that policies governing collective goods are vulnerable to attack even if they enjoy broad public support.⁶⁰ Most of the public supports standards and accountability, but not passionately so. When policies governing collective goods exact costs from particular groups, the aggrieved parties have a strong incentive to organize against the policies. The institutions governing education grant highly committed factions a power exceeding their numbers, education's loosely coupled organizational structure offering multiple entry points to derail policy adoption or implementation (for example, state legislatures, local school boards, the superintendent's office, the classroom). Progressives and traditionalists supply ideas that transform personal complaints into philosophical positions. Progressives who oppose test-based accountability appeal to wary students, parents, and educators with the argument that accountability not only threatens them personally but also promotes the wrong kind of education. A national group, Students Against Testing, describes itself as "a nationwide network of young people who resist high-stakes standardized testing and support real-life learning."⁶¹ These are not students who simply dislike tests; they are students with a philosophy of education.

The fragmented structure of educational governance also works against accountability. Authority over schools is shared by federal, state, and local officials. The arrangement is not hierarchical in the sense of greater powers lodged at higher levels of governance. Rather, the distribution of power follows constitutional language granting states primary authority in educational matters, creating a patchwork of programs and practices that conform to individual state political cultures and local traditions that have evolved largely by historical accident. The federal government arguably has the least power. Consider the No

Child Left Behind Act. Federal enforcement of the act is limited to **[End Page 22]** withholding Title I program monies from noncooperative states. The Title I program, which targets poor children, did not exist before its founding in 1965 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Total federal funding of K-12 education constitutes only 7 percent of national revenues, and thus the leverage that is generated from threatening to cut off a single program's funds is severely limited. What leverage there is comes from state officials who view federal education money as an entitlement.

Exit Exams Lower SAT Scores:

High school exit exams decrease SAT scores after controlling for confounding factors

The Effect of High School Graduation Exams on SAT Scores (Press Edit).

Gregory J. Marchant and Sharon E. Paulson. Ball State University March, 2004.
Gifted Child Today.

The demographics from the College Board's SAT database showed that with the exception of significantly fewer blacks in states without graduation examinations, the samples of SAT test-takers in each state were not significantly different. The relation between graduation exams and SAT scores were examined on the state aggregated level and on the individual level. First, a multiple regression was used to examine the impact of states' requirement of a graduation exam on state aggregated SAT scores (from the College Board SAT data source). The percentage of minority test-takers, percent of students with parents with bachelors degrees or above, and mean high school grade point average (GPA) for each state were included in the equation. Minority status ($r_{sp} = -.12, p < .01$), parents' college education ($r_{sp} = .40, p < .001$), high school GPA ($r_{sp} = .24, p < .001$), and graduation exam requirement ($r_{sp} = -.10, p < .05$) were significant predictors for total SAT scores aggregated by state (see Table 2; $R = .96, p < .001$). A second multiple regression analysis predicting individual student SAT scores used the same variables. Because of the increased size of the sample (from states to individuals), the variables of family income over \$80,000 and class rank in the top 10 percent of the high school class were added as predictors. The equation was a significant predictor of individual SAT scores (see Table 3; $R = .64, p < .001$) with each predictor accounting for a significant amount of unique variance. The requirement of a high school graduation examination had a significant negative impact on individual SAT scores on ($r_{sp} = -.04, p < .01$).

High school exit exams reduce the pool of minority applicants to college and lower SAT scores

The Effect of High School Graduation Exams on SAT Scores (Press Edit).
Gregory J. Marchant and Sharon E. Paulson. Ball State University March, 2004.
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The results of this study suggested that SAT scores may be negatively influenced by the requirement of a high school graduation examination. Even when controlling for substantial demographic variables related to the outcomes, high school graduation examinations contributed to lower SAT scores. Colleges report their pools of applicants, especially minority applicants, are being reduced by high school graduation exam requirements (Schmidt, 2000). Even if the high school graduation exam were not a barrier to a diploma, it may still be a detriment to higher education.

Alternative – “Multiple Pathways”:

Multiple pathways is a better alternative to more standardization

‘RESTORING VALUE’ TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D.

University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

How might we as a society do this? While no one has given us a commission of our own to direct, our earlier writing allows us to limn the elements of more thorough reforms. We have both worked for nearly two decades on ways of restructuring high schools to make them more academically challenging, relevant, equitable, and engaging. One approach—the one we choose to advance here—is currently called multiple pathways by some advocates and seeks to develop theme-based approaches—or pathways—through high schools, somewhat similar to the majors and concentrations prevalent in postsecondary education.⁶² Some of these might be broadly occupational (business, medical occupations, IT, or industrial production) and some might involve non-occupational themes (social justice, environmental concerns, problems of cities, or the patterns of immigration), but all of them would provide room for examining the important occupational, political, and social issues of adult life in the process of teaching disciplinary subjects. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, these theme-based pathways offer multiple ways for students to graduate ready for both college and work, not one or the other. At best, these pathways also prepare for civic participation by embedding the curriculum in the workings of social institutions as well as workplaces.

Advantages of multiple pathways

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Such configurations have the distinct advantage of not looking like the conventional high school: while calls to replace the nineteenth century model are sometimes vague in their details, pathways approaches offer a clear and distinctly different alternative. They address relevance, and they allow for a wide range of internship and service learning experiences. Such approaches are consistent with the basic precepts for greater motivation and engagement in the high school, whereas the standard academic curriculum violates almost all of them. Along with these benefits, pathways approaches also offer students significant choices, making the likelihood of greater students interest much higher. And, if pathways approaches enhance motivation and engagement among students who are otherwise alienated from school, then they are likely to enhance equity as well, particularly as measured by rates of high school completion and college enrollment.⁶³

Alternative – Funding:

Insufficient research has been done on alternative uses of such large sums of money, several possibilities exist

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Second, if meeting the demands of exit exams costs as much as 8.5% of state funds, the question arises whether exit exams are the most cost-effective way to enhance standards and performance. Perhaps other approaches—appropriate professional development to improve the quality of instruction, or the kinds of restructuring proposed in the conclusion of this brief, or even financial rewards (a.k.a. bribes) for students who improve their performance—might prove more effective uses of such large sums. But this question has seldom posed, never mind answered.

Alternative – Test Scores + GPA to Graduate:

Test scores need to be used in combination with GPA to produce accurate results

Haney, W., 2000. "The Myth of the Texas Miracle in Education," Education Policy Analysis. Volume 8.

This discussion leads naturally to a simple solution for avoiding reliance on test scores in isolation to make high stakes decisions about students. As previously mentioned, the recent High Stakes report of the National Research Council (Heubert & Hauser, 1999) states clearly that using a sliding scale or compensatory model combining test scores and grades would be "more compatible with current professional testing standards" than relying on a single arbitrary passing score on a test (Heubert & Hauser, 1999, pp. 165-66). Moreover this is exactly how test scores are typically used in informing college admissions decisions, such that students with higher high school grade point averages (GPA) need lower test scores to be eligible for admission, and conversely students with lower GPA need higher test scores. Ironically enough this is indeed exactly how institutions of higher education in Texas use admissions test scores in combination with GPA. For example, in 1998, the University of Houston required that in order to be eligible for admissions, high school students who had a grade point average of 3.15 or better needed to have SATI total scores of at least 820, but if their high school GPA was only 2.50, they needed to have SATI total scores of 1080 (University of Houston, 1998).

Literally decades of research on the validity of college admissions test scores show that such an approach, using test scores and grades in sliding scale combination produces more valid results than relying on either GPA or admissions test scores alone (Linn, 1982; Willingham, Lewis, Morgan & Ramist, 1990). Moreover, such a sliding scale approach generally has been shown to have less disparate impact on ethnic minorities (and women) than relying on test scores alone (Haney, 1993).

Combination GPA and test score approaches reduces the racial disparity in educational performance

Haney, W., 2000. "The Myth of the Texas Miracle in Education," Education Policy Analysis. Volume 8.

As can be seen, under such a sliding scale approach, higher grades can compensate for lower test scores and vice versa (that is why the sliding scale approach is sometimes called a compensatory model). Under this approach, the number of Black and Hispanic students passing would increase from 1,395 to 1,765—a 27% increase. Under a sliding scale approach, the number of White students passing would also increase slightly (from 436 to 487), but since the latter increase is smaller proportionately, the disparate impact on Black and Hispanic students would be reduced.

Alternative – Graduation Projects:

Graduation projects are a better alternative to exit exams

Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/0...> What Does It Take to Graduate? What's in a test? Linda Darling-Hammond Tuesday, June 28, 2005. San Francisco Chronicle.

Are you one of those workers who goes to the office to find a list of multiple choice questions on your desk -- and goes home again after filling in the answers, work done for the day?

If your answer is no, it's because almost nothing we do in the world of work requires recognizing one of several pre-selected responses to questions about a single fact or piece of information. Most jobs in today's knowledge- based economy require that we find, assemble and analyze information; write and speak clearly and persuasively; and work with others to solve messy problems that don't have predetermined answers.

This is why a growing number of states are encouraging schools to evaluate student learning by using performance assessments, such as senior projects, essays, research papers, scientific experiments, mathematical models and oral presentations. In many states, districts must consider these demonstrations of real-world abilities as part of the graduation decision, in combination with students' academic records and tests. This helps them evaluate the full range of state learning standards, including critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.

Alternative – Test Results + Additional Requirements (Generic):

Research shows more success when exit exams are not a single necessary standard

Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/0...> What Does It Take to Graduate? What's in a test? Linda Darling-Hammond Tuesday, June 28, 2005. San Francisco Chronicle.

Though some have worried that allowing these broader assessments would lower standards, our research suggests that the opposite is more likely to occur. In a nationwide study of state graduation policies over the last decade, we found that most states that have successfully raised standards and increased graduation rates use a state test as only one indicator of achievement, taking additional measures -- including grades, coursework and performance assessments -- into account when determining graduation.

In Oregon, for example, students are scored on a set of work samples in English, mathematics, science and social science. They also build a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates work-related skills like problem solving, communication and teamwork in order to receive a Certificate of Mastery. In Washington, the state is creating performance assessments and portfolios as alternatives to its exit exam. In Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Maine, districts must use performance assessments alongside state tests for graduation. In these states -- all of which have higher achievement than California -- the exit exam cannot be used as the sole measure to determine or deny a diploma.

Multiple measures insures that graduation results are valid

Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/0...> What Does It Take to Graduate?

What's in a test? Linda Darling-Hammond Tuesday, June 28, 2005. San Francisco Chronicle.

Relying on multiple measures of assessment ensures that the graduation decision is valid (testing experts agree that important decisions should not be made on the basis of a single test) and that students will encounter the kinds of challenging work they will need in college and the real world. As Achieve, a national organization of governors, business leaders and education leaders, has noted: "States ... need to move beyond large-scale assessments because, as critical as they are, they cannot measure everything that matters in a young person's education. The ability to make effective oral arguments and conduct significant research projects are considered essential skills by both employers and postsecondary educators, but these skills are very difficult to assess on a paper-and-pencil test."

Having a necessary exit exam standard decreases results across the board

Darling-Hammond, L. 2005. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/0...> What Does It Take to Graduate? What's in a test? Linda Darling-Hammond Tuesday, June 28, 2005. San Francisco Chronicle.

The handful of states that have enacted exit exams without alternatives have experienced sharp declines in graduation rates, and researchers' findings -- summarized in a report from the National Academy of Sciences -- showed that schools sometimes boost their accountability ratings by pushing out students who score poorly, so that the average scores will go up. In addition, most research finds that too much emphasis for multiple-choice tests leads schools to neglect higher-order skills and ultimately "dumbs down" the curriculum. One recent study by Ball State University researchers found that states using exit exams as the primary graduation measure not only had higher dropout rates for at-risk students but declines in SAT scores for students as a whole.

AT: Diploma from Test Key to Demonstrate Job Skills:

Public perception of high school diplomas is so entrenched that exit exams will not boost their value

State High School Exit Examinations and Postsecondary Labor Market Outcomes. John Robert Warren University of Minnesota, Eric Grodsky University of California at Davis, Jennifer C. Lee Indiana University. *Sociology of Education* Issue 81, January 2008

The most likely reason, we believe, rests with the enduring and institutionalized meaning of the diploma itself. First, with continued increases in postsecondary attainment, the value of the high school diploma has been in decline for some time. Whether a result of pure credential inflation (Collins 1979) or increased technological and skill demands in the labor market (Autor, Levy, and Murnane 2003), the high school diploma is not viewed as a strong indicator of skills. Rather, having a high school diploma—but no postsecondary credential—may signal some kind of limited cultural attainment. Whatever the high school diploma means to employers specifically and to the public more generally, its meaning derives more from a deeply held logic of confidence in schooling than from any objective sense of the cognitive or productive skills that high school graduates possess (Meyer and Rowan 1978). Despite rhetoric to the contrary, people's beliefs about the meaning of the high school diploma may simply be unresponsive to modest or even more consequential changes in what students must do to earn it.

Study finds that exit exams do not help students with employment

State High School Exit Examinations and Postsecondary Labor Market Outcomes. John Robert Warren University of Minnesota, Eric Grodsky University of California at Davis, Jennifer C. Lee Indiana University. *Sociology of Education* Issue 81, January 2008

States have usually adopted HSEEs in response to the perception that a substantial number of graduates lack skills that are required for success in the modern economy. What do these educational reforms mean for students' postsecondary economic and labor market prospects? The central hypothesis of the study presented here was that state HSEE policies have the effect of widening gaps in labor force status and earnings between young people who have high school diplomas and those who do not. To test this hypothesis, the authors modeled the association between state HSEE policies and these labor market outcomes using data from the 1980–2000 U.S. censuses and the 1984–2002 Outgoing Rotation Groups of the Current Population Survey. The results revealed no evidence that state HSEEs positively affect labor force status or earnings or that the connections between state HSEE policies and these outcomes vary by students' race/ethnicity or the level of difficulty of state HSEEs.

Employers do not know of exit exams or need the skills taught by them for their high school-diploma employees

State High School Exit Examinations and Postsecondary Labor Market Outcomes. John Robert Warren University of Minnesota, Eric Grodsky University of California at Davis, Jennifer C. Lee Indiana University. *Sociology of Education* Issue 81, January 2008

It is not known whether employers are aware of state HSEEs, value the skills that state HSEEs assess, or believe that the skill thresholds that are required to pass state HSEEs are adequate to improve the informational value of the high school diploma. Given the occupations held by most high school graduates who fail to go on to college, it seems at least reasonable to wonder whether academic skills have any bearing on employees' productivity or employers' hiring and compensation decisions. Some work in sociology (discussed later) has suggested that the skills that state HSEEs seek to measure are not the skills required by those who employ high school graduates, which undermines the utility of implementing such policies. In fact, among those aged 18–24 who completed high school or a general equivalency diploma (GED) between 1974 and 1990, some of the most commonly held occupations required relatively limited academic skills.² Employers who hire college grads will not care about high school tests. Employers who hire college-educated workers are much less likely to be concerned with the literacy and numeracy skills that are taught at the secondary level and more likely to be concerned with advanced skills, knowledge, or training.

Employers prioritize untestable characteristics to those that are testable

How Should Colleges Assess And Improve Student Learning? Employers' Views On The Accountability Challenge. A Survey Of Employers Conducted On Behalf Of: The Association Of American Colleges And Universities. By Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. January 9, 2008

When it comes to the assessment practices that employers trust to indicate a graduate's level of knowledge and potential to succeed in the job world, employers dismiss tests of general content knowledge in favor of assessments of real-world and applied-learning approaches. Multiple-choice tests specifically are seen as ineffective. On the other hand, assessments that employers hold in high regard include evaluations of supervised internships, community-based projects, and comprehensive senior projects.

Employers' emphasis on integrative, applied learning is reflected in their recommendations to colleges and universities about how to assess student learning in college. Again, multiple-choice testing ranks lowest among the options presented, just below an institutional score that shows how a college compares to other colleges in advancing critical thinking skills. Faculty evaluated internships and community-learning experiences emerge on top. Employers also endorse individual student essay tests, electronic portfolios of student work, and comprehensive senior projects as valuable tools both for students to enhance their knowledge and develop important real-world skills, as well as for employers to evaluate graduates' readiness for the workplace.

The job market does not really need that much education

'RESTORING VALUE' TO THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA: THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICE OF HIGHER STANDARDS. W. NORTON GRUBB, Ph.D.

University of California, Berkeley JEANNIE OAKES, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles October 2007. EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH UNIT.

However, competitiveness, growth, and productivity are due to dozens of factors, of which education is only one.¹³ The economic resurgence of the U.S. between the early 1980s (when A Nation at Risk started the current round of commission reports and education reforms) and the 1990s was due to many macroeconomic and microeconomic factors, but were not likely due to improvements in education. The assumption in Tough Choices or Tough Times that “a very high level of [academic] preparation will be an indispensable foundation for everything that comes after for most members of the workforce”¹⁴ ignores a point that Rumberger and Levin have been trying to make since the mid-1980s: while some high-skill jobs have high rates of growth from a low base of employment, the largest numbers of job openings occur in lower-skilled positions. In the most recent projections, occupations unambiguously requiring some college or college (a baccalaureate degree) or more will account for only 24.6% of job openings between 2004 and 2014.¹⁵ So the idea behind College for All, or the college prep curriculum as a default curriculum, is based on assumptions about the labor market that are questionable at best.

VB Negative Evidence

Exit Exams and Academic Achievement:

Studies show exit exams contribute to student achievement

The Role of End-of-Course Exams and Minimum Competency Exams in Standards-Based Reforms. John H. Bishop, Ferran Mane, Michael Bishop, and Joan Moriarty Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 267-345

Norman Fredericksen's study is the most valuable because he had access to confidential data on 1978 and 1986 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores of public school students together with the location of the school they were attending. This enabled him to classify NAEP test takers in 1978 and 1986 by whether they lived in a state with high-stakes testing, moderate-stakes testing, or no- or low-stakes testing in 1986. His 1978 base year was before the introduction of minimum competency testing systems. Student data for both 1978 and 1986 were available for twenty-seven states. The "High Stakes" category was composed of states that Fredericksen judged "had not only mandated the use of MCTs [minimum competency tests]; they also required school officials and teachers to set standards in terms of MCT scores for granting diplomas and promoting students to the next grade." Ten of the twenty-seven states were considered to have a "High Stakes" testing system. The "Moderate Stakes" states had MCTs but "professed to use the MCTs for such purposes as monitoring student performance, remediation of simple faults, or coaching those students who badly need assistance." Seven states were placed in the moderate-stakes category. The remaining eleven states were placed in the low-stakes category. Three states had no MCTs. None of the others "mandated the use of

MCT scores for any specific purpose.... Some states allowed local options regarding the use of MCTs by county, by district or by individual school."

Fredericksen selected NAEP mathematics items that had been administered in both years and classified them into routine items (generally simple computation) and nonroutine items (assessing higher-order thinking skills). Using a difference of differences methodology, he compared the 1978 to 1986 change in percent correct for high-stakes states with the change in percent correct for low-stakes states. Because stakes applied to promotion decisions, graduation, schools, and individual students, he studied all three of the age groups assessed by NAEP. He found that 1978 to 1986 gains in percent correct for routine items were 7.9 percentage points higher for nine-year-olds, 3.1 points higher **[End Page 289]** for thirteen-year-olds, and 0.6 points higher for seventeen-year-olds in high-stakes states than in low-stakes states. On nonroutine items the high-stakes state advantage was 4.5 points for nine-year-olds, 4.6 points for thirteen-year-olds, and 1.9 points for seventeen-year-olds. With the exception of the routine items given to seventeen-year-olds, these are substantial differentials.

Exit exams eventually increase college enrollment

The Role of End-of-Course Exams and Minimum Competency Exams in Standards-Based Reforms. John H. Bishop, Ferran Mane, Michael Bishop, and Joan Moriarty Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 267-345

State MCEs had no effects on overall college entry rates in the fall of 1992. However, this result hides equal and opposite effects on students with good and bad grades in eighth grade. We estimate that A students in MCE states were 2.8 percentage points more likely to be in college in fall 1992 than A students in non-MCE states, while C- students were 2.7 percentage points less likely to be in college than C- students in non-MCE states.

One year later in fall 1993, however, all students, regardless of GPA, were more likely to be attending college when they grew up in an MCE state. The positive effect of state MCEs on college enrollment in 1993-94 was not significantly different for students with good and bad GPAs in eighth grade. Thus, state MCEs apparently delayed the graduation of some eighth graders with C- GPAs, and this delayed their entry into college. But one year later college attendance rates of C- students were 2.3 percentage points higher in MCE states than non-MCE states. Attendance was also higher for other students. Our regressions also predict that B students were 4.4 points more likely and A students were 3.3 points more likely to be attending college in MCE states.

Exit exams catalyze discourse about student achievement

How have High School Exit Exams changed our schools? Some perspectives from Virginia and Maryland CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY | JUNE 2005

For the most part, principals and school officials felt the HSAs are having a positive impact—the curriculum map, the quarterly and mid-course assessments, and the essential curriculum have been good “diagnostic and instructional tools,” as one principal noted. Another principal said, “I think they are good assessments, and they’re a springboard for conversations about how our students are doing. They get us talking.” A colleague echoed this sentiment that collaboration has grown by observing, “The teachers have a lot more professional development together now, centered around the curriculum maps. The teachers get together and grade mid-course assessments. They are in a better position to assess where some of the weaknesses are.”

Studies have found that exit exams raise performance

Test-Based Accountability: The Promise and the Perils. Tom Loveless. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2005.1 (2005) 7-45

John Bishop of Cornell University has examined systems targeting both students and educators. He analyzes the 1996 and 1998 NAEP scores of eighth graders in states with different accountability regimes—for students, meeting basic course requirements, passing minimum competency exams, and passing **[End Page 9]** curriculum-based external exit exams; and for schools, receiving rewards or sanctions based on test scores. Students in states requiring curriculum-based external exit exams (New York and North Carolina) exhibited the highest levels of achievement, with an advantage of 0.45 grade levels in math and science, followed by states that reward and sanction schools, with gains of 0.20 grade levels. Minimum competency tests had a positive but insignificant effect. Requiring particular courses for high school graduation had no effect.⁷

The most interesting evidence on student accountability comes from a series of studies by Bishop, including an analysis of international evidence. He discovered that students in countries with curriculum-based external exit exams scored higher on international math and science assessments than those in countries with less stringent promotion requirements.⁸ The same pattern held true for Canadian provinces. Those employing such tests exhibited higher test scores than the provinces that did not.⁹ In the United States, Bishop finds positive achievement effects for the New York Regents program and the Michigan Merit Award Program. Michigan's program offers one-year \$2,500 scholarships to students who meet or exceed standards in reading, math, science, and writing. The tests include demanding material, and students who fall short do not face negative consequences. Thus the program is not high stakes for failure, nor is it predicated on students' demonstrating minimum competency in basic subjects, two aspects of accountability systems that have drawn fire from critics.¹⁰ Bishop

concludes that systems combining student and school accountability hold great promise for raising academic achievement, especially when performance on end-of-course exams or other curriculum-based tests is the outcome that states measure and reward.

International research from Germany shows exit exams lead to greater achievement

THE EFFECT OF CENTRAL EXIT EXAMINATIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM TIMSS GERMANY. 2005. Hendrik Jürges University of Mannheim Kerstin Schneider University of Wuppertal Felix Büchel Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin Journal of the European Economic Association

The most notable difference between students in states with and without CEEs is their achievement in mathematics and science. Students in states with CEEs score on average 0.4 standard deviations higher than those in states without CEEs. Student background, measured in terms of the number of books at home, differs only slightly in this respect—the proportion of students within each range is very similar in CEE and non-CEE states. There are far more students with an immigrant background in the non-CEE group than in the CEE group. This is largely attributable to the relatively low rates of immigration to East Germany, where most states have central exit examinations (a legacy of the former GDR education system). Interestingly, the cumulative number of mathematics lessons—calculated from the official timetables of all federal states (Frenck 2001)—is considerably smaller for students in non-CEE states.

Data shows that achievement gaps have dramatically narrowed and those who don't pass often fail graduation requirements in other areas.

Jack O'Connell California Superintendent of Public Instruction California Progress Report. 2006.

http://www.californiaprogressreport.com/2006/06/why_the_califor.html

Before California ever put the exit exam into place, graduation requirements varied widely from school to school. Some schools pushed every student to succeed, while others handed out diplomas merely for occupying a classroom desk. Far too many students – particularly poor, Latino, African American, or students with disabilities – were handed diplomas without gaining the essential skills in reading, writing, and math.

I wrote the law creating the exam in 1999 so that would never happen again. Six years later, it is clear, based on research and data, the test is working as intended. Students across the state are meeting higher expectations as a result of the exit exam.

As of the March administration of the test, more than 90 percent of the Class of 2006 has passed both portions of the exam in order to earn a diploma. That's an additional 4,542 high school seniors who have passed it since February. This is a great improvement since the students began taking this test in their sophomore year.

I am particularly heartened to see that the achievement gap in the passing rate has narrowed significantly. English learners improved 39 percentage points, more than double the rate of white, non-Hispanic students. Hispanic students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students made double or more the improvement of white students.] While this is encouraging, it is imperative that all of us in education do more to focus on the needs of these

students. We must move quickly to close these gaps, and having the exit exam as a graduation requirement is critical to our efforts.

Students had another opportunity to take the exit exam in May, and there will be another test in July. I believe that of the remaining 41,758 students -- less than 10 percent of high school seniors in the Class of 2006 who have yet to fulfill the requirement -- more and more will pass the exit exam. An informal survey by the California Department of Education of major California school districts about their exam passage rates, reveals that many of the students who have not yet passed the test also failed to fulfill other requirements of graduation, such as course completion or attendance requirements. In fact, most report between 2 percent and 5 percent of their senior class will not graduate solely because of the exit exam.

Exit Exams and College Preparation:

Exit exams promote college readiness

The Future of Children. Volume 19, Number 1, Spring 2009. E-ISSN: 1550-1558
Print ISSN: 1054-8289. DOI: 10.1353/foc.0.0024. College Readiness for All: The
Challenge for Urban High Schools. Melissa Roderick, Jenny Nagaoka and
Vanessa Coca

Student performance on high school exit examinations is another possibility for assessing college readiness. Today twenty-two states have such examinations, covering 65 percent of the nation's students.²⁹ Some policy organizations, such as Achieve, have argued that aligning the content of high school exit examinations with college expectations would be an important step in focusing high schools on college readiness.³⁰ But high school exit examinations are generally not intended to measure college readiness. Rather, they set minimum standards for graduation.³¹ Because students may need multiple chances to pass the exit exams, in most states students begin to take these exit exams in tenth grade. As a result, exam standards are lowered to cover only material to which students would have been exposed by tenth grade and are generally aligned with tenth-grade, not twelfth-grade standards. Even with low standards, high school exit examinations may indicate whether students have accumulated enough basic proficiency skills to gain access to a four-year college. There is some evidence that focusing on basic skills is important in reducing the likelihood of college remediation. For example, more than 41 percent of high school graduates with senior-year test scores in the lowest test quintile in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 who attended college were placed in remedial reading in college compared with only 19.2 percent of students in the next-to-lowest quintile and only 10 percent of students in the third quintile.³² This finding would suggest that if states can identify the lowest-performing students and intervene, they can increase the rates of college readiness of their graduates as measured by meeting the criterion of enrolling in credit-bearing courses.

Employers and college professors overwhelmingly support tougher expectations, including exit exams

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: ARE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES PREPARED FOR COLLEGE AND WORK? A STUDY OF RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES, COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS, AND EMPLOYERS FEBRUARY 2005 CONDUCTED FOR: Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies

College instructors and employers agree that requiring an exit exam (79%, 89% respectively) and a harder curriculum (81%, 83%) would improve things.

More than nine in ten (94%) employers say that giving students college placement tests when they are juniors to find out whether they are ready for college-level work or what else they need to learn to be ready would improve things, including 45% who believe that this would improve things a great deal. Eighty-five percent of college instructors agree.

Exit Exams and Study Habits:

Exit exams reduce the stigma associated with studying

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

CBEEESs should also shift attention toward measures of absolute achievement and away from measures of relative achievement, such as rank in class and teacher grades. Advocates of CBEEESs hope that CBEEESs will reduce peer pressure against studying. Interviews I conducted during 1996 and 1997 with middle-school students in Ithaca, New York (a small city dominated by two universities) indicate that most boys internalize a norm against "sucking up" to the teacher. How does a student avoid being thought a suckup? He:

- . Avoids giving the teacher eye contact
- . Does not raise his hand in class too frequently; and
- . Talks or passes notes to friends during class (this signals that you value friends more than rapport with your teacher).

Steinberg, Brown and Dornbush conclude similarly that "The adolescent peer culture in America demeans academic success and scorns students who try to do well in school (1996, p.19)." My conversations with Swedish students sometimes generate similar anecdotes.

Exit exams as opposed to rankings or curves unify classes to study harder

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Why are the studious called suck ups, dorks, and nerds? In part, it may be because grading exams on a curve meaning that study effort by one student tends to make it more difficult for others to get top grades. When exams are graded on a curve or college admissions are based on rank in class, the joint welfare of students is maximized if no one puts in extra effort.

In the repeated game that results, side payments-friendship and respect- and punishments-ridicule, harassment, and ostracism-enforce the co-operative "don't study" solution. If, by contrast, students were evaluated relative to an outside standard, they no longer have a personal interest in getting teachers off track or persuading each other to refrain from studying. Peers should, in theory, become less tolerant of students who joke around in class or try to get the teacher off track.

Exit Exams Increase the Quality of Instruction:

Exit exams prompt teachers and schools to monitor student's progress more carefully

"It's Different Now": How Exit Exams Are Affecting Teaching and Learning in Jackson and Austin (*Report - Full*) Author(s): Dalia Zabala, Angela Minnici. Center for Education Policy. March 2007.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the Jackson Public Schools developed a set of "benchmark" assessments in various subjects and for all school levels. These assessments, which are given every nine weeks, are designed to gauge how well students have mastered content and whether they are prepared for the state assessments. As state standards and assessments have changed, the benchmark assessments have also been adjusted to accurately reflect changes in expectations. One administrator characterized these district-scored assessments as "another way to tell what teachers and students are doing." Teachers and school administrators use results from the benchmark assessments to assess students' strengths and weaknesses and to differentiate or alter instruction to address the weaknesses. The district has made it a priority to provide students with the necessary assistance well before the SATP examinations. Both administrators and teachers said that data from the district assessments have been helpful in determining which students need more targeted assistance in particular content areas. One teacher made the following observation about the nine-week tests: They illustrate where we are and where we need to work . . . We know when our kids need more help and what they need it on, so that when they go to remediation, we know what we should do. Another teacher reported: My children have continually had problems with some areas. I try to spend more time on those areas each year. It affects the next year

because I change my instruction because the district gives us a sheet on what objectives students are doing well on.

Exit exams prevent teachers from teaching only what they personally like

"It's Different Now": How Exit Exams Are Affecting Teaching and Learning in Jackson and Austin (*Report - Full*) Author(s): Dalia Zabala, Angela Minnici. Center for Education Policy. March 2007.

Administrators reported that before the SATP became a requirement, some teachers would spend time covering only the concepts they were interested in. But this has changed, as one administrator explained using math as an example: If [teachers] liked slope, they might spend a week teaching slope, but there are only a few questions on slope. So, in reality, they should have spent more time on equations and inequalities. There are things that teachers would spend so much time teaching that were not even on the benchmarks or on the state exam, but now that is not acceptable. [The SATP] has changed what they teach and how much time they spend on certain things. It has them on a lockstep methodological pace. Another administrator agreed that "for years teachers have taught whatever they wanted to teach" but that after the benchmark assessments were introduced, teachers could no longer "put emphasis only on the things they like."

Exit exams create a tremendous incentive to teach better causing less drop-outs

High School Exit Examinations and High School Dropout in Texas and Florida, 1971-2000 Author(s): John Robert Warren and Krista N. Jenkins Source: Sociology of Education, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 122-143

On the other hand, there is reason to expect that the impact of state high school exit examinations on dropout will be minimal. Exit examinations have clear consequences for students who take them, but they also have real consequences for teachers and school and district administrators. When test results are released, headlines in newspapers and on the web sites of departments of education feature stories about how students in particular schools and districts performed relative to other students in the state. Because teachers, principals, and district administrators are evaluated-at least partially-on the basis of how well students do on exit examinations, they have a tremendous incentive to make pass rates appear as high as possible. One way to do so is to guarantee that as many students as possible are well educated and can pass the state-mandated exit examination.

Exit exams may compel teachers to teach better

High School Exit Examinations and High School Dropout in Texas and Florida, 1971-2000 Author(s): John Robert Warren and Krista N. Jenkins Source: Sociology of Education, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 122-143

First, and most optimistically, it may be that students, teachers, and schools are rising to the challenge posed by these more-stringent graduation requirements. A major objection voiced by teachers to high school exit examinations is that they are forced to "teach to the test," narrowing the curriculum and altering pedagogical practices. In some cases, class-rooms or entire schools are devoting weeks or months of classroom time to preparing for the exit examinations. Despite their objections, it may be that teachers in Texas and Florida have been successful in getting almost all students (who would not have dropped out in the absence of an exit examination) to pass the exit examinations on the first or sub-sequent attempts.

Exit exams set up many good incentive structures for teachers

THE EFFECT OF CENTRAL EXIT EXAMINATIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM TIMSS GERMANY. 2005. Hendrik Jürges University of Mannheim Kerstin Schneider University of Wuppertal Felix Büchel Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin Journal of the European Economic Association

The theoretical literature almost unanimously shows that CEEs, and hence central standards, improve student performance and might even raise welfare (Costrell 1997; Effinger and Polborn 1999). Central exit examinations are purported to function better as incentives for students, teachers, and schools than decentralised examinations (e.g., Bishop 1997, 1999). Students, for example, benefit because the results of CEEs are more valuable as signals on the job market than the results of noncentral examinations, simply because the former are comparable. Furthermore, students who have to meet an external standard at the end of their school career have no incentive to establish a low-achievement cartel in class, possibly with the tacit consent of the teachers. Student test results can be used to monitor teacher and teaching quality on a regular basis. Whether incentives to improve teaching quality, arguably an important factor in the education production function, should come solely from reputation effects or in the form of higher pay for better teachers is open to discussion (Lavy 2002, 2003; Glewwe, Elias, and Kremer 2003; Jürges, Richter, and Schneider 2004). Finally, the reputation of entire schools can be based on the achievement of its students, with good schools attracting good students (provided that aggregate CEE results are made available to the public).

Exit exams solve the problem of teachers feeling pressure to inflate grades

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Teachers. In the US, 30% of the teachers say they "feel pressure to give higher grades than students' work deserves" and "feel pressure to reduce the difficulty and amount of work you assign" (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 1994).

Under a system of external exams, teachers and local school administrators lose the option of lowering standards to lower failure rates and raise self-esteem.

Their response will be to strive to prepare their students for the external exam.

Tests constructed by individual teachers are much worse than standardized tests

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The assumption of opponents appears to be that the tests developed by individual teachers for use in their class are better than examinations developed by the committees of teachers that would have responsibility for developing state or national examinations. To the contrary, the tests that teachers presently develop for themselves are generally of very low quality. The Fleming and Chambers (1983) study of tests developed by high school teachers using Bloom's taxonomy of instructional objectives found that over all grades, 80 per cent of the items on teachers' tests were constructed to tap the lowest of the taxonomic categories, knowledge (of terms, facts or principles) (Thomas, 1991, p. 14). Rowher and Thomas (1987) found that in colleges fully 99% of items on instructor-developed tests in American history required the integration of ideas, while only 18% of junior high school and 14'10 of senior high school test items required such integration. Secondary school teachers test low-level competencies because that is what they teach. Few students take state-mandated tests in history, so. poor history teaching cannot be blamed on standardized tests.

Grading exit exams helps teachers teach better

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CI3EEE advocates argue to the contrary that well-designed external examinations that are graded by teachers will improve instruction. In May 1996, I interviewed several activists in the Alberta Teachers Union about the examination system in Alberta Canada. Even though the union and these teachers opposed the exams, they universally reported that serving on grading committees was a wonderful professional development activity (Bob, 1996)." Having to agree on what constituted excellent, good, poor, and failing responses to essay questions or open-ended math problems resulted in a sharing of perspectives and teaching tips that most found very helpful.

High quality high-stakes tests are mimicked at lower levels, improving everyday education.

Richard P. Phelps (“Defending Standardized Testing” Mahwah, NJ, USA:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated, 2005. p 30-360)

A secondary benefit of high-stakes tests' quality is that, because of their perceived importance, they become mimicked at lower levels. It is appropriate to abhor teaching to the test— at least if that phrase is taken to mean teaching the exact items that will appear on a test, or limiting instruction only to those objectives that are addressed on a high-stakes test. However, it is also important to recognize the beneficial effects of exposing educators to high-quality writing prompts, document-based questions, constructed-response formats, and even challenging multiple-choice items. It is not cheating, but the highest form of praise when educators then rely on these exemplars to enhance their own assessment practices.

Exit Exams Increase Quality of Schools and Administration:

Exit exam results change student preferences for which school to attend and so further incentivize schools

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Where students and parents choose their secondary school and state subsidies follow the student, the incentive effects of CBEEESs are magnified. In countries that have school choice and a CBEEES, newspapers typically publish league tables that report examination results by school. These results have major effects on enrolment applications the following year. Marginal instructional costs are typically below state aid per student, so schools at the top of the league table often expand (sometimes by bringing in temporary classrooms), forcing the schools with poor results to shrink and layoff staff.

Without an exit exam, short term incentives dictate against good academic standards

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

School administrators. Local school administrators make hundreds of decisions that influence academic expectations and program quality (e.g., homework guidelines and whether to retain a popular but not very effective teacher). In many countries, schools are expected to achieve a host of often conflicting objectives: fostering self-esteem, providing counseling and supervising extra-curricular activities, musical training, health services, community entertainment (e.g.; interscholastic sports). These other goals require additional staff and different kinds of staff, and so the goals may not be achieved by hiring teachers with strong backgrounds in calculus or chemistry. When there is no external assessment of academic achievement, students and their parents benefit little from administrative decisions that opt for higher standards, more qualified teachers, or a heavier student work load. The immediate consequences of such decisions: higher taxes, more homework, having to repeat courses, lower gradepoint averages (GPAs), complaining parents, a greater risk of being denied a diploma-are all negative.

HSEEs are high stakes but also for the educators meaning they will have strong external motivation to raise pass rates

Greg Toppo Standardized high school exit exams put states to the test; Basic-skills mandate brings delays, debate. USA Today. LIFE; Pg. 11B. October 30, 2007

A third reason that state HSEEs might not matter for high school completion has to do with the consequences of state HSEE pass rates for teachers, schools, and school administrators. State HSEEs are “high stakes” tests for students, but they are also highly consequential for the people who are supposed to educate students. Teachers, schools, and administrators face strong external motivation to raise pass rates on high school exit (and other) examinations; in the era of No Child Left Behind, salaries, job security, and even local control of schools often rest in part on test results. At the same time, states have historically allowed exemptions from their HSEE requirements for students with learning disabilities or with limited English language proficiency—and they have typically left individual decisions about student exemptions to local administrators and teachers.

Many states use exit exams to refine their curriculum

State High School Exit Exams: Working to Raise Test Scores (*Report - Full*)

Author(s): Dalia Zabala, Dr. Angela Minnici, Jennifer McMurrer, Dr. Deanna Hill, Alice P. Bartley, and Jack Jennings September 06, 2007 Center on Education Policy

Purposes related to carrying out state policy ranked among the most identified for implementing high school exit exams. About 75% of the 24 participating state's reported that the purpose of the exam is to provide data to state policymakers on student attainment of state education goals to inform educational policy decisions. Considering that 19 of the 24 states participating in our survey use the state high school exit exam to meet the No Child Left Behind Act's high school assessment requirements, it is not surprising that states identified curriculum issues as another major purpose for implementing high school exit exams. Seventy-five percent of the participating states reported that the purpose of the exam is to determine prospective high school graduates' mastery of the state curriculum (e.g. standards, curriculum frameworks), and 66% of the participating states reported that the purpose of the exam is to increase alignment of local curriculum and programs of instruction with state education standards. Efforts to close achievement gaps were identified as purposes of the exam by several states. About 71% of the states reported that the purpose of implementing high school exit exams is to encourage districts and schools to identify and serve students at risk of failure. And 62% reported that the purpose of the exam is to promote equity of opportunity across all student groups.

Exit exams increase the legal avenues for increasing funding to education

March 2004. School Finance: From Equity to Adequacy by Laura Lefkowitz Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

It is likely that states will be faced with adequacy lawsuits for some time to come. Adequacy arguments are supported by the standards movement's principle that all children, given the right opportunities to learn, can attain high achievement levels. The No Child Left Behind Act has added even more power to the argument. For example, data regarding adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the failure of some schools to meet AYP goals may potentially be used as evidence by plaintiffs that states are funding education at inadequate levels. Although researchers disagree about the extent to which more money will lead to improved student achievement, one argument is that if large numbers of children are not achieving proficiency, they are, by definition, not receiving an adequate education.

Exit exams create incentives for entire communities to get involved

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

Comparisons of the benefits and costs of focusing school resources and policies on academic achievement also influence parents, school administrators, and teachers. When a CBEEES is in place, exam results displace social class as the primary determinant of school reputations and this in turn should induce school staff to give enhanced learning higher priority. Teachers will upgrade curricula and assign more homework, and parents will demand better science labs and more rigorous teaching. School administrators will be pressured to increase the time devoted to examination subjects and hire more qualified teachers.

Without an exit exam, schools as a whole are not motivated to have high standards

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

When student learning is not assessed externally, the positive effects of choosing academic rigor are negligible and postponed. If college admission decisions are based on rank in class, GP A, and aptitude tests--and not on externally assessed achievement in secondary school courses--then upgraded standards will not improve the college admission prospects of next year's graduates. Graduates will probably do better in difficult college courses and will be more likely to get a degree, but that benefit is uncertain and far in the future. Maybe over time the school's reputation and, with it, the admission prospects of graduates will improve because current graduates are more successful in local colleges. That, however, is even more uncertain and postponed. Publishing data on proportions of students meeting targets on standardised tests probably speeds the process by which real improvements in a school's performance influence its local reputation. But other indicators such as SAT test scores, proportions going to various types of colleges, and the socioeconomic background of the students tend to be more prominent. As a result, school reputations are determined largely by things that teachers and administrators have little control over: the socio-economic status of the student body and the proportion of graduates going to college.

Without exit exams, parents and students have no short term incentives to set higher standards

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

Few American employers pay attention to achievement in high school or school reputations when making hiring selections (Bishop, 1989, 1993; Hollenbeck and Smith, 1984). Consequently, students who study hard are not immediately rewarded with higher wage rates. Their greater competence is not fully recognised with higher wage rates until more than a decade after they graduate. Thus, higher standards benefit students as a group only after many years, so parents as a group have a reduced incentive to lobby for higher teacher salaries, higher standards, and higher school taxes.,

Exit exams shift reputation to academics

ILR Collection Articles & Chapters Cornell University ILR School Year 1999 Are National Exit Examinations Important for Educational Efficiency? John H. Bishop

External exams in secondary school subjects change the- sign'aHing environment. Hiring better teachers and improving the school's science laboratories now yields a visible payoff--~ore students passing the external exams and being admitted to top colleges. School reputations will now tend to reflect student academic performance rather than the family background of the community or the success of football and basketball teams.

Exit Exams and Employment Opportunities:

Exit exams signal competence to employers

The Role of End-of-Course Exams and Minimum Competency Exams in Standards-Based Reforms. John H. Bishop, Ferran Mane, Michael Bishop, and Joan Moriarty Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 267-345

The second way MCEs improve job opportunities is by sending a signal to employers that "all the graduates of this high school meet or exceed your hiring standards." The fact that they have passed the MCE is the proof. In most communities, competencies developed in the local high school are poorly signaled to employers. The lack of signals of achievement in high school tends to make employers with the best jobs reluctant to risk hiring recent high school graduates. They often carry in their head very negative stereotypes regarding recent high school graduates. A black personnel director interviewed for a CBS-TV special on educational reform proudly stated, "We don't hire high school graduates any more, we need skilled workers."⁵⁴ They prefer, instead, to hire workers with many years of work experience because an applicant's work record serves as a signal of competence and reliability that helps them identify the most qualified.

By establishing a minimum competency exam, therefore, a school district or state education system can try to overcome this signaling problem and help its graduates get good jobs. The existence of the minimum competency exam graduation requirement should be well known to local employers. With the MCE requirement, the school's diploma now signals more than just seat time; it signals meeting or exceeding certain minimum standards in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Because of pooling, all high school graduates should benefit from an MCE regime, not just the students with low achievement levels in eighth grade.

The increased economic value of diplomas with exit exams

The Role of End-of-Course Exams and Minimum Competency Exams in Standards-Based Reforms. John H. Bishop, Ferran Mane, Michael Bishop, and Joan Moriarty Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 267-345

Conventional wisdom predicts that a minimum competency exam will cause graduation rates to fall. But this, too, is not necessarily the case. Economic theory makes an unambiguous prediction of lower graduation rates only for when the rewards for getting a diploma and for effective teaching are unaffected by establishing an MCE. This, however, is not likely to be the case. Minimum competency exams improve the information signaled by the diploma, so the economic payoffs to getting a diploma and to academic achievement are likely to increase. The publicity that inevitably attends the publication of school results on medium- and high-stakes tests will make teachers and administrators more accountable for the achievement of at-risk students. If the returns to greater student effort and to increased focus on teaching at-risk students do not diminish too rapidly, learning might improve so much that graduation rates rise when an MCE is established.

Exit exams actually increase the economic ability of nongraduates

Incentives and Equity under Standards-Based Reform. Julian R. Betts and Robert M. Costrell. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 9-74

Less widely understood, however, is that higher standards also raise the average quality of the pool of nongraduates, insofar as some students who would previously have passed now fail. Because nongraduates (like graduates) are evaluated by employers in part on the average quality of their pool, their wages also tend to rise. This is not a minor point. The reason nongraduates **[End Page 11]** typically fare so poorly under the existing system is that the ease of social promotion exacerbates the stigma attached to nongraduation.⁵ Thus, it is a logical fallacy to argue, as many do, that higher standards will reduce more students to the current economic level of nongraduates; the stigma on nongraduates depends on their average quality, and that depends critically on the standard itself.

CBEEE (Curriculum Based External Exit Exam) Good:

Because the Curriculum-Based External Exit Examination (CBEEE) provides multiple levels of achievement and compare based on world class content standards, the attention is removed from competing against each other

The Effect of National Standards and Curriculum-Based Exams on Achievement
Author(s): John H. Bishop Source: The American Economic Review, Vol. 87, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Hundred and Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association (May, 1997), pp. 260-264 Published by: American Economic Association

A CBEEE has the following traits: 1. It produces signals of student accomplishment that have real consequences for the student. 2. It defines achievement relative to an external standard, not relative to other students in the classroom or the school. Fair comparisons of achievement across schools and across students at different schools are now possible. Robert Costrell's (1994) analysis of the optimal setting of educational standards concluded that more centralized standard-setting (state or national achievement exams) results in higher standards, higher achievement, and higher social welfare than decentralized standard-setting (i.e., teacher grading or schools graduation requirements). 3. It is organized by discipline and keyed to the content of specific course sequences. This focuses responsibility for preparing the student for particular exams on one teacher (or a small group of teachers). 4. It signals multiple levels of achievement in the subject. If only a pass-fail signal is generated by an exam, the standard will have to be set low enough to allow almost everyone to pass, and this will not stimulate the great bulk of students to greater effort (Suk Kang, 1985; Costrell, 1994, 1997). 5. It covers almost all

secondary-school students. Exams for a set of elite schools or for those specializing in a particular field will influence standards in that segment but may have limited effects on the bulk of students. A single exam taken by all is not essential. Some nations offer high- and intermediate-level exams in the same subject.

CBEEE's improve the signaling of academic achievement. As a result, colleges and employers are likely to give greater weight to academic achievement when they make admission and hiring decisions, so the rewards for learning should grow and become more visible. CBEEE's also shift attention toward measures of absolute achievement and away from measures of relative achievement, such as rank in class and teacher grades. Grading on a curve or basing college admissions on class rank gives students a personal interest in persuading each other not to study. The studious are called nerds, in part, because they are making it more difficult for others to get top grades. When exams are graded on a curve, joint welfare is maximized when no one studies. In the repeated game that results, side payments (friendship and respect) and punishments (ridicule and harassment) enforce the cooperative "don't study" solution. When, by contrast, learning is assessed relative to an outside standard, students no longer have a personal interest in getting teachers off track or in persuading each other to refrain from studying.

Empirical data verify CBEEEs are effective

The Effect of National Standards and Curriculum-Based Exams on Achievement
Author(s): John H. Bishop Source: The American Economic Review, Vol. 87, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Hundred and Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association (May, 1997), pp. 260-264 Published by: American Economic Association

Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). -The just-released TIMSS provides 1994-1995 data for 7th- and 8th-graders for 39 countries. Comparative- education studies and education encyclopedias were reviewed, and embassy personnel were interviewed to determine which of the TIMSS nations have curriculum-based externally set exit examinations in secondary school. Twenty-one national school systems were classified as having CBEEE's for both mathematics and science in all parts of the country: Bulgaria, Columbia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Iran, Israel, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. Four countries (France, Iceland, Norway, and Romania) had CBEEE's in mathematics but not in science. Five countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States) had CBEEE's in some provinces but not in others. The countries classified as not having a CBEEE in either subject were Belgium (both Flemish- and French- speaking systems), Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. Following George Madeus and Thomas Kellaghan (1991), the university entrance examinations in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus and the ACT and SAT in the United States were not considered to be CBEEE's. University entrance exams should have much smaller effects because students headed into the job market do not take them, and teachers can avoid responsibility for their students' exam results by arguing that not everyone is college material or that examiners have set an unreasonably high standard to limit enrollment in higher education.

Policies regarding age of entry into school and grade retention vary across countries, so comparisons must hold student age constant, not grade in school. Consequently, the dependent variable for this analysis is the median test score for the nation's 13-year-olds from table 1.5 of Albert Beaton et al. (1996a, b). For countries not included in this table, the 13-year-old median was estimated by age adjusting the 7th- and 8th-grade means. The median math and science test scores were regressed on per capita gross domestic product for 1987 and 1990, deflated by a purchasing-power-parity price index, a dummy for East Asian nations, and a dummy for CBEEE. The results presented in Table 1 indicate that test scores are significantly higher in more developed nations, in East Asian nations, and in nations with a CBEEE. The impact of a CBEEE is about one U.S. grade-level equivalent in mathematics and 1.2 grade-level equivalents in science.

AT: Exit Exams and Inequality:

Exit exams are egalitarian

Incentives and Equity under Standards-Based Reform. Julian R. Betts and Robert M. Costrell. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 9-74

A rise in standards thus leads to gains for two of the three groups--those at the top, who graduate, and those at the bottom, who would not have graduated anyway. The losers are those in the middle, who would have graduated under a less stringent standard, but who now fail. Those individuals suffer from being pooled with a group that includes those less skilled than themselves (those without the diploma) instead of with those more skilled than themselves. No efficiency loss has occurred in this pure sorting model, only a distributional effect stemming from the individuals' relabeling. Do these losses constitute a compelling case against higher standards? The answer is no, for two reasons.

First, in terms of the narrow choice between high and low cutoffs, a high cutoff does not necessarily lead to less egalitarian outcomes. The redistribution is from the losers in the middle to the winners at both the top and the bottom. Those with the most egalitarian preferences (so-called Rawlsians, after the philosopher John Rawls) place the highest priority on raising incomes at the bottom, so they should favor a rise in standards.⁶ The equity implications of higher standards are not limited to those who are at increased risk of failing but include those who would fail in any case, and whose stigma stands to be reduced.

AT: Exit Exams lead to More Drop-Outs:

Exit exams do not contribute to dropping out

The Role of End-of-Course Exams and Minimum Competency Exams in Standards-Based Reforms. John H. Bishop, Ferran Mane, Michael Bishop, and Joan Moriarty Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001 (2001) 267-345

Minimum competency exams are different from Carnegie unit graduation requirements and, consequently, may have different effects.³⁶ In our view, failing an MCE test the first or second time it is taken is rarely going to lead the student to give up and drop out. People tend to attribute bad outcomes to external factors, bad luck, and other temporary circumstances ("I was feeling sick," "the test didn't cover the material I studied," or "I didn't try") rather than to their innate ability.³⁷ As a result, they are likely to be optimistic about their chances of passing the next time. Only 4.3 percent of the tenth graders in New Jersey, New York, and Ohio who were questioned after failing an MCE expressed a fear that they would not graduate. Most reacted by "studying harder next year" (24 percent), taking summer school courses (29 percent), repeating the same course next year (24 percent), taking a special course the next year (9 percent), and getting tutoring help (30 percent).³⁸ Incentives to stay in school to get the diploma will rise if the signal sent by MCEs makes academic achievement or the diploma more valuable in the labor market. Nevertheless, educators are very concerned about the possibility that MCEs will increase dropout rates of students with poor grades and low test scores, so that is the hypothesis that will be tested.

Study shows no correlation between exit exam and drop-out rates

High School Exit Examinations and High School Dropout in Texas and Florida, 1971-2000 Author(s): John Robert Warren and Krista N. Jenkins Source: Sociology of Education, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 122-143

When we classified GED recipients as dropouts, we found no evidence that moving from a minimum-competency test to a higher-competency test had any bearing on the dropout rate in either Texas or Florida for the classes of 1991-2000. What is more, we found no evidence that racial/ethnic or socioeconomic inequalities in dropout were exacerbated by moving from a minimum-competency test to a higher-competency test. The relationships between dropout and race/ethnicity, home ownership, and house-hold head's education each remained unchanged after the implementation of a higher-competency exit examination. In short, whether or not we classified GED recipients as dropouts, our analyses provide no evidence that state high school exit examinations are independently associated with high school dropout or with inequalities in dropout in either Texas or Florida.

Exit exams only act as low hurdles and do not devastate graduation rates.

Jay P. Greene [Ph.D, Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research],
Marcus A. Winters [Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Polciy
Research]. Education Working Paper. No5. May 2004. Pushed Up or Pulled Up?
Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools.

First, the number of students who fail to graduate because they cannot pass exit exams might be very small. One reason this is plausible is that passing exit exams might require very low levels of proficiency. The Fordham Foundation (2004) evaluated accountability programs in 30 states on a variety of measures.

Overall, the study gave a rating of “poor” to the rigor of state-mandated standardized tests. No state received the highest rating in this category measuring the difficulty of passing the exams, and only one state’s requirements were high enough to be deemed “solid.” In short, exit exams may be such a low hurdle that they trip up very few students. Another reason exit exams may stop few students from graduating is that students have several chances to pass the exams before they are finally denied a diploma. Most students who are serious about graduating high school should be able to pass such an exam if given enough tries, even if only by chance. Also, states that adopt exit exams typically go out of their way to provide extra instruction to students who have failed the test. Thus exit exam requirements may not only be a low hurdle, but students have multiple chances to jump the hurdle.

Even this small pool of students who cannot pass the exit exam may be canceled out by a similar number of students who do graduate when they otherwise wouldn’t have because the test provided schools with an incentive to improve. One idea behind exit exams is that schools, wishing to save themselves the embarrassment of performing poorly on the exam, will improve the quality of instruction they provide. Schools can only improve their performance on the

exams by producing more students able to pass the exams. This incentive might force schools to realign their focus toward students who were in danger of dropping out before. If the number of students positively affected by the adoption of an exit exam is similar to the number of students who cannot pass the test, we would find no relationship between exit exams and graduation rates.

HSEEs do not uniquely have large impacts on graduation percentages because eventually nearly every student graduates.

Greg Toppo Standardized high school exit exams put states to the test; Basic-skills mandate brings delays, debate. USA Today. LIFE; Pg. 11B. October 30, 2007

On the other hand, there are a number of reasons to suppose that state HSEEs have relatively little consequence for high school completion. First, most states' tests may simply be too easy to pose a real threat to students' chances of completing high school. For example, a June 1999 report by the Ohio Department of Education (1999) showed that in the fall of 1990 only 33% of ninth graders passed that state's ninth-grade proficiency test; ninth graders in the fall of 1990—ostensibly members of the graduating class of 1994—were the first cohort required to pass that test as a prerequisite for graduation. Although 2 students in 3 initially failed the ninth-grade proficiency test that year, 97% had passed it by the spring of 1994 (when they were scheduled to graduate). That figure rose to 99% for subsequent cohorts.

HSEE's do not hinder people because those who are certain to graduate, would, and those who most likely wont, will not prevented merely because of this barrier.

Greg Toppo Standardized high school exit exams put states to the test; Basic-skills mandate brings delays, debate. USA Today. LIFE; Pg. 11B. October 30, 2007

Second, if they matter for high school completion, state HSEEs likely matter primarily for the small subset of students whose chances of graduating are low, but not so low that graduating is impossible. Students who are practically certain to graduate—or not to graduate—will likely not be affected by additional requirements such as state HSEEs. If state HSEEs only really matter for a small subset of students, then it is conceivable that teachers and schools successfully focus their energies and resources on helping this group of students pass HSEEs.

States with HSEE have lower graduation rates, however those states are also the most economically disadvantaged (alt causality)

John Robert Warren, Kristina N Jenkins, and Rachael B. Kulick. High School Exit Examinations and State-Level Completion and GED Rates, 1975 Through 2002. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis. EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS 2006;

Completion rates, however measured, are simply much lower in states with HSEE policies (Marchant & Paulson, 2005). For example, for the graduating class of 2002 the median state high school completion rate (as defined below) was 75% for states with no HSEE but only 66% in states with HSEEs; in fact, the interquartile ranges of the two distributions only slightly overlap. However, it is not the case that a random subset of states has elected to implement HSEE policies. As shown in the bottom panel of Figure 1, states with HSEE requirements are principally located in the southern and southeastern United States. Many of these states have long been among the most economically disadvantaged in the nation, many have traditionally fared poorly on national assessments of achievement, and many contain high proportions of racial or ethnic minorities, urban residents, or both.⁵ Given these factors, it is not surprising that states that require HSEEs have lower high school completion rates.

In the next sections we describe our measures of states' high school completion rates, states' HSEE policies, and other key covariates. Throughout, our unit of analysis is state-years—constructed by cross-classifying 50 states and the District of Columbia by the 28 years from 1975 through 2002, to yield 1,428 state-years. Note that “years” refers to graduating classes, not to calendar years. For example, when we say that North Carolina had an HSEE in 2002, we mean that the graduating class of 2002 was subject to that policy in that state.

AT: Exit Exams and Bias:

Standardized exams prevent schools from making exams biased for their own constituencies

Vol. 69 (1999), No. 1, pp. 53-69 Journal of Economics Zeitschrift für Nationalökonomie_9 Springer-Verlag 1999 - Printed in Austria. A Model of Vertically Differentiated Education. Matthias R. Effinger and Matthias K. Polborn

In Germany, there is a debate whether the final exam in the Gymnasium should be administered centrally or at the school level. At the moment, there are some states with a central exam and some in which each school separately administers the exam. The exam in the centralized states is generally considered as considerably more difficult, and fewer students pass the exam than in the decentralized states. The terminology of "decentralization" and "centralization" regimes is influenced by this situation. However, we think that it is quite a natural assumption that each school, if it has to decide on its level on its own, will take its student body as given and choose the academic level which maximizes these students' average productivity. On the other hand, a centralized standard-setting institution is under less direct pressure from ~ students and also has to care about/2 students; thus this institution will also take into account the effect a higher academic level has on the students' decision which school to attend. However, if the reader does not agree with this interpretation, he can take "centralization" and "decentralization" simply as definitions for two games with a different order of moves.

Truly standardized tests are designed to avoid any sort of bias.

Richard P. Phelps (“Defending Standardized Testing” Mahwah, NJ, USA:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated, 2005. p 30-360)

On the other hand standardized tests are designed to be as similar as possible for all test takers. The logic behind standardization stems from the scientific method. Standardize all conditions and any variation across measurements is due to differences in the characteristic being measured, which in educational testing is some type of knowledge, skill, or other proficiency. To claim that a test is standardized means that it is developed according to carefully designed test specifications, it is administered under uniform conditions for everyone, the scoring of the test is the same for everyone, and different forms of the test are statistically and qualitatively equivalent. Thus, in testing, standardization is tantamount with fairness.

Attaching high-stakes to standardized tests increases scrutiny of the tests, making them more reliable, unbiased, and useful.

Richard P. Phelps (“Defending Standardized Testing” Mahwah, NJ, USA:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated, 2005. p 30-360)

Another beneficial consequence of high-stakes testing is the effect that the introduction of consequences has had on the tests themselves. Along with more serious consequences has come heightened scrutiny. The high-stakes tests of today are surely the most meticulously developed, carefully constructed, and rigorously reported. Many criticisms of tests are valid, but a complainant who suggests that today's high-stakes tests are "lower-order" or "biased" or "inauthentic" is almost certainly not familiar with that which they purport to critique. If only due to their long history and ever-present watchdogging, high-stakes tests have evolved to a point where they are: highly reliable; free from bias; relevant and age appropriate; higher order; tightly related to important, publicly-endorsed goals; time and cost efficient; and yielding remarkably consistent decisions.

AT: Teaching to the Test:

“Teaching to the test” is desirable in order to ensure that the curriculum actually teaches the information necessary to meet standards.

Richard P. Phelps (“Defending Standardized Testing” Mahwah, NJ, USA:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated, 2005. p 30-360)

Finally, it is possible to align instruction with the curriculum guide, content standards, and so forth (depending on the terminology used to describe the valuable student outcomes in a particular locale). And, it is obviously desirable that any high-stakes test be closely aligned with the curriculum or content standards it purports to assess. Thus, it would neither be a coincidence— nor inappropriate— if the well-aligned instruction and testing bore a strong resemblance to each other. This is sometimes mistakenly referred to as teaching to the test where the more accurate (and supportable) practice should probably be distinguished by use of a different descriptor, such as teaching to the standards or similar.

AT: Exit Exam Narrow the Curriculum:

Claims of “narrowing the curriculum” are really just ideological battles

Test-Based Accountability: The Promise and the Perils. Tom Loveless. Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2005.1 (2005) 7-45

Although research suggests that narrowing of the curriculum does take place in response to accountability, the crucial question, of course, is whether such narrowing is good or bad. One person's "narrowing of the curriculum" is another person's "focusing on what is important." An emphasis on writing may be a sound educational strategy for Florida if it is the subject on which that state's students need the most help. Moreover, long-standing philosophical disputes concerning what schools should teach are often reflected in analysts' judgment of whether concentrating more on some subjects at the expense of others is educationally sound. Educational traditionalists may applaud paring the curriculum back to an emphasis on basic skills. Ideology plays a significant role in the politics of accountability.

AT: Major/Empirical Studies Against Standardized Exit Exams:

Amrein and Berliner study is flawed as it never accounts for fluctuations in graduation/drop out rates and GED interest, among others.

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and
Marcus A. Winters- Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.
Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High
Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

Amrein and Berliner (2002b) examined whether states that adopted exit exams have seen increased dropout rates, decreased graduation rates, or increased percentages of students pursuing a GED instead of a high school diploma. They found that 66% of states that implemented high school exit exams were negatively impacted by the tests because their movement towards less desirable outcomes on at least one of these measures was larger than the national average. They used a method identical to that used in their earlier analysis of the effect of high-stakes testing on academic achievement (Amrein and Berliner, 2002a).

There are several problems with Amrein and Berliner's analysis that call their results into question. One is that comparing changes in graduation rates in states with testing to those made by the national average is misleading. The more obvious comparison would have been between states with and states without high-stakes tests. Another is that their analysis relies only on the dichotomous measure of whether states made gains or losses relative to the national average. Their measure fails to account for the magnitude of changes in graduation rates, dropout rates, and rates at which students seek GEDs. It would have been far more appropriate for Amrein and Berliner to use a simple linear regression model.

All of these problems with Amrein and Berliner's analysis are likely to have a substantial effect on support for their conclusions. Hanushek and Raymond (2003) noted the same set of difficulties in Amrein and Berliner's analysis of the effect of state testing on students achievement. When Hanushek and Raymond re-analyzed Amrein and Berliner's state testing data correcting for these methodological flaws, they found that the evidence supported the *opposite* conclusion from the one Amrein and Berliner had reached.

Carnoy and Loeb study is flawed because it does not specifically address exit exams in particular

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and **Marcus A. Winters-** Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

Carnoy and Loeb (2003) studied the effect of accountability testing generally on state-level graduation rates. They developed an index to measure the strength of states' accountability systems, including whether the state had a high school exit exam as well as numerous other factors. They then examined what effect the strength of a state's accountability system had on its high school retention rate. Carnoy and Loeb found no relationship between the strength of a state's accountability system and its retention rates in the high school years.

Because it only looks at accountability in general, however, Carnoy and Loeb's study does not measure the effect of exit exams in particular. In their study each state is given a score on the accountability index whether it has an exit exam or not. It is certainly possible that accountability reforms other than exit exams might have very different effects on graduation rates. Carnoy and Loeb do not claim to directly measure the effect of exit exams in particular, but this omission makes the study less relevant to the question at hand.

Warren and Jenkins study is flawed because its based on CPS

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and **Marcus A. Winters-** Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

In their analysis of the effect of exit exams on graduation rates, Warren and Jenkins (2003) use student reports of graduation in Florida and Texas.³ Their method relies upon the Current Population Survey (CPS), which has been administered by the U.S. Census for several decades. Both Florida and Texas went from giving no exit exam to requiring passage of an easy basic skills test to requiring that students pass a more difficult exit exam. Warren and Jenkins evaluate whether either of these changes in exit exam requirements led to higher dropout rates. They find that neither the initial adoption of an exit exam nor the adoption of a more difficult test had an effect on graduation rates in Florida or Texas.

While no graduation rate measure produces a perfect calculation, those using CPS are particularly unreliable. First, like all surveys, CPS relies on correct self-reporting by respondents. Dropping out of high school is something survey respondents are particularly likely not to report truthfully. Also, CPS does not include people in institutionalized populations, including people in prison, in its survey sample. A large percentage of the nation's high school dropouts live in such institutionalized settings, so they go unmeasured by CPS. Finally, CPS data do not allow researchers to distinguish graduates from public and private schools.

NELS data is flawed because it requires middle schoolers to take exit exams therefore might distort high school data (might pre-prepare them)

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and Marcus A. Winters- Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

Some researchers have used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data set to evaluate whether there is a relationship between high school exit exams and graduation. NELS provides individual-level information for a large national sample of students who entered high school in 1988 and were tracked over time by the NELS study.

Reardon and Galindo (2002) use the NELS data set to evaluate the effect of 8th grade exit exams on dropout rates. They find that students who were required to pass a test to enter the 9th grade were more likely to drop out prior to entering 10th grade. By limiting their analysis to students required to pass an exam before even entering high school, however, their study might not effectively evaluate whether high school exit exams, which are often first administered in the 10th or 11th grades, lead to higher dropout rates. Also, their analysis is suspect because they rely on data from the NELS survey to determine whether students were required to pass an exit exam. Warren and Edwards (2003) contend that these data are unreliable. For instance, they point out that in their own analysis of NELS they found a large amount of variability within states in administrator reports of whether the state required an exit exam.

NELS data sets provide no relationship between exit exams and higher dropout rates

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and **Marcus A. Winters-** Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

In his analysis of the NELS data set, Jacob (2001) found no overall relationship between exit exams and higher dropout rates. He did, however, find that students in the bottom quintile who were required to pass an exit exam were more likely to drop out of high school than similar students who did not face a testing requirement.

Muller (1998) also examined the NELS data set and found no relationship between having to pass an exit test and dropping out of high school. However, because Muller was also interested in measuring the effect of teacher expectations on the likelihood of graduating, she restricted her analysis to students for whom there was also information from teacher surveys. This eliminated many students from her sample and could have affected her results.

Warren and Edwards (2003) also found no relationship between testing and graduation in their evaluation of the NELS data set.⁴ Unlike Reardon and Galindo, Warren and Edwards relied on state reports of whether students were required to pass an exit exam. They found that having to pass an exit exam was not associated with a student's chances of dropping out or of obtaining a GED instead of a diploma.⁵

NELS studies are bad because they don't evaluate different cohorts of students

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D- Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and **Marcus A. Winters-** Research Associate, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools. Education Working Paper No. 5 May 2004

As Jacob (2001) points out, all studies using the NELS data set are only able to evaluate the effect of testing on one cohort of students. It would be better, Jacob writes, to measure the gains of different cohorts within states before and after tests were implemented. Warren and Jenkins (2003) also make this argument, writing, "we can learn a lot from NELS:88 about the effects of high school exit examinations on the high school class of 1992, but absolutely nothing about their effects on subsequent (or preceding) high school classes." While this study does not look at individual-level data, our state-level analysis is able to measure graduation rates before and after each state implemented an exit exam, drawing results from multiple cohorts rather than the single cohort tracked by NELS.

Greene and Winters Study shows that exit exams have no effect on a state's graduation rate

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This study uses a fixed-effects regression model to evaluate whether adopting a high school exit exam affects a state's graduation rate. This model allows us to measure graduation rates in each state before and after it implemented an exit exam.6

First we calculated graduation rates for each state from the class of 1991 to the class of 2001. We used two distinct but highly respected methods for calculating graduation rates, one developed by Jay Greene (see Greene and Winters 2002) and the other used for national graduation rate comparisons over time by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES).7

Greene's method of calculating graduation rates has emerged as one of the most widely respected of such measures. Calculations using this method have been used to report states' graduation rates in widely read and highly regarded publications (for example, see Education Week 2002 and Education Trust 2003). This method divides the number of diplomas awarded by a state in a given year by the estimated number of students who entered the ninth grade four years earlier, making adjustments for high school population changes in the ensuing four years (for a complete description and discussion of Greene's method see Greene and Forster 2003).

The second graduation rate calculation is a state-level version of the method used by NCES to evaluate the national high school graduation rate over time. For

each year, we simply divided the number of diplomas awarded by public schools in a given state by the number of 17-year-olds in the state's population during that year according to the U.S. Census.⁸ The graduation rates calculated using this Census method are lower than the actual public school graduation rates because students attending private schools are excluded from public-school diploma counts but are included in the measurement of the 17-year-old population. However, since our goal is to measure the change in public school graduation rates over time, as long as there is no dramatic change in the percentage of students who attend private schools in a state relative to other states, this Census method remains useful.

Of the two methods, graduation rate calculations using Greene's method are likely to be the more precise. However, it is certainly the case that neither of these methods provides a perfect calculation of the graduation rate. No method can claim such precision. Each of these methods has been proven to produce reliable estimates of the percentage of students who graduate from high school. Furthermore, if our analysis yields similar results using both methods we can have greater confidence in the findings.

Next we identified which states require students to pass an exit exam in order to receive a high school diploma.⁹ For each state with an exit exam we also determined which high school graduating class was the first that had to pass a test for graduation. Table 1 lists the 18 states we identified that administered a high school exit exam during the years of our analysis, as well as the first graduating class from whom diplomas were withheld if students failed the exam.

In each of our analyses we controlled for school spending and secondary teacher-student ratio.¹⁰ These data served as controls for reforms other than implementing an exit exam that might affect state-level graduation rates. Furthermore, while the thrust of this study is to evaluate the effect of high school exit exams on graduation rates, we were also interested in whether these other education reforms improve graduation rates.

We then performed analyses using a fixed-effects regression model to examine whether adopting an exit exam has an effect on high school graduation rates. We separately used each of our two graduation rate calculations as dependent variables. This model controls for dummy variables for each state and year, which allows our analysis to follow the effects on graduation rates in each state over time. Our analysis focuses on a dummy variable indicating whether a state required an exit exam for each particular year's graduating class. By treating each state-year as an independent observation, our model can evaluate graduation rates in each state before and after an exam was implemented.

Results

Table 2 reports the analyses using both Greene's method and the Census method for calculating graduation rates. Both analyses show that implementing a high school exit exam has no significant effect on a state's graduation rate. Both analyses show a small negative coefficient (-0.764 using Greene's method and -1.11624 using the Census method), which would be associated with a small negative effect on graduation rates. But both analyses are statistically insignificant at any reasonable definition (p values equal 0.423 and 0.143, using Greene's and the Census methods, respectively).¹¹ This means we cannot conclude that high school exit exams actually do have an effect on graduation rates, positive or negative. If any such effect exists, it cannot be distinguished from ordinary fluctuations in graduation rates.

Both analyses also show that spending more money per pupil has no significant effect on graduation rates, but the analyses differ on whether the secondary teacher-student ratio has a significant effect. The analysis using Greene's method finds no significant relationship between secondary teacher-student ratio and graduation rates. The Census method, however, shows a statistically significant positive relationship between a higher secondary teacher-student ratio and graduation rates. This surprising finding indicates that increasing the number of students per teacher actually raises a state's graduation rate. The effect,

however, is very small. Increasing the secondary student-teacher ratio by one student improves graduation rates by only 0.335 percentage points according to the Census method. Given that this finding is counterintuitive and is not robust across both of the graduation rate estimates, our conclusion is that changes in the secondary teacher-student ratio probably have no real effect on graduation rates.