

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

Graduation Test Update:

States That Recently Eliminated or Scaled Back High School Exit Exams

The number of states requiring high school graduation exams in language arts and math has declined rapidly over the past few years. *Only twelve states have graduation tests in place for the high school class of 2019, down from a high of 27 that had or planned such tests.* The current number is the lowest level since at least the mid-1990s.

According to extensive research, exit exams have harmed tens of thousands of youth but not improved the outcomes of high school graduates. (See <http://www.fairtest.org/time-abolish-high-school-graduation-tests>.)

Listed below are states that still have exit exams, have suspended their graduation exam requirements, plan to implement new tests, or have granted retroactive diplomas to students who failed the test but completed other requirements.

States that have graduation tests for the high school class of 2019: Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, a total of 12. Some allow appeals or alternatives. This list includes states where students must pass end of course tests (EOCs) in order to graduate, but not where an EOC just counts as part of a course grade.

Recently ended grad tests: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota, Nevada, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and South Carolina.

Moratorium on exit exams: Pennsylvania (2020; it has repeatedly been pushed back a year or two).

Retroactively awarded diplomas to students who had not passed exams: Alaska, Arizona, California, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina, and Texas. Mississippi has an appeals process allowing students who did not pass the previous exit exam to receive diplomas. South Carolina allowed those who did not pass to appeal to their local school boards through the end of 2015.

Recently reduced number or weight of tests:

- Mississippi requires minimum test scores, though somewhat low test scores can be combined with higher grades to allow graduation.
- Tennessee, Nevada and Georgia replaced graduation tests with end-of-course (EOC) tests that factor into student course grades but which students do not have to pass. Other states such as North Carolina have similar EOC requirements.
- Texas reduced its plan for 15 required exit tests to five in 2013, then added the right for students to use an alternative for up to two of the five if they fail them.

88 Governor Winthrop Rd., Somerville, MA 02145
fairtest@fairtest.org 617-477-9792 <http://fairtest.org>

- Indiana in 2017 passed legislation to allow multiple pathways to graduation in addition to end-of-course tests. Effectively, students do not have to pass a test to earn a diploma, though how easy or hard that will be remains to be seen, including the use of a ‘locally determined’ option.

New civics test graduation requirements: The Education Commission of the States (2017) reports that since 2015, 8 states have made passing a high school civics exams modeled on the 100-question immigration citizenship test a graduation requirement: Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Missouri, Nevada, North Dakota and Utah. Many exempt students with disabilities and sometimes other students. Not one of these states requires students to pass any other tests to graduate. Seven other states require students to take but not pass the test. In this period, 18 states rejected bills proposing such a law. Some reports say nearly every student passes the multiple-choice exam.

Scheduled to implement new tests:

- Colorado, Class of 2021: will be a series of test/assessment alternatives, ranging from SAT or ACT to district options that do not have to be a test.

Sources: Materials from and correspondence with Jennifer Zinth from Education Commission of the States; Hyslop, A., 2014, *The Case against Exit Exams*, New America Education, Policy Brief, https://www.newamerica.org/downloads/ExitExam_FINAL.pdf; news clips; state education department websites and responses to our questions; and *Education Week*. On civics exams, see <https://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/The-Civics-Education-Initiative-2015-2017.pdf>.

No one organization systematically reports on graduation exams. Please send updated information to us.

- August 2018