The Implications of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability for Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options

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Overview of Topics

- Increasing Standards – New Pressures
- AYP Complications – With and Without Assessments
- Diploma Options and Issues
- Evidence-Based Practices
Increasing Standards – New Pressures

- Achieve’s American Diploma Project

  Several reports note the lack of rigor of current requirements for graduation

- Recent Study of High School Grads (Peter D. Hart Research Associates)

  Graduates, College Instructors, Employers
Study Findings:

✓ Many high school graduates are not prepared for college or entry-level jobs.
✓ College students have gaps in preparation for academic expectations.
✓ Non-students have gaps in job skills.
✓ Real world experiences of those who withdrew from college also show gaps in preparation.
Study Findings:

✓ Employers agree that high school education leaves a large proportion of students unprepared.

✓ College instructors are the harshest critics of public high schools.

✓ The quality of preparation that students receive in high school is closely associated with high expectations and solid academic standards.
Study Findings:

✓ Beyond the decision to go to college, demographics have less impact.

✓ Knowing what they know now, high school graduates would have worked harder and chosen a more rigorous curriculum.

✓ Higher standards, tougher courses, and more evaluations are strongly supported.
AYP Complications

There is school accountability to consider. If we raise high school standards, we are likely to affect adequate yearly progress too.
How graduation rate is calculated is defined by each state for NCLB – general rule is 4 years after 9th grade with a standard diploma.

This applies to each subgroup as well as to all students.
With Assessments

When students also have to pass a test to graduate, that adds another hurdle, and sometimes these tests are NCLB tests too!

States with graduation exams that are also used as an NCLB exam:

Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Requirement to Pass Exit Exams for Standard Diploma

Intended:

- More students will participate in the general education curriculum and achieve results
- Higher academic expectations improve access to postsecondary education and employment
- Differences between general education and special education are reduced
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Requirement to Pass Exit Exams for Standard Diploma – cont

Intended:

• Exit exams signify a minimum standard for all students – gives clearer meaning and value to diplomas earned

• Educators will use differentiated instructional strategies, including use of accommodations, to assist students in meeting higher academic standards and passing exit exams
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Requirement to Pass Exit Exams for Standard Diploma – cont

Unintended:

• Some students with disabilities will fail to receive a diploma

• Higher dropout rates may results

• Student self-esteem is lowered by repeated failures

• Dissatisfaction and conflicts with parents may result; possibilities for lawsuits may occur
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Requirement to Pass Exit Exams for Standard Diploma – cont

Unintended:

- Some students may need to remain in school longer to meet the requirements of a standard diploma
- States and local districts may be “forced” to create alternative diplomas and pathways to ensure that students exit with some form of high school exit credential
## Status of Graduation Exams

### Based on Survey Conducted in 2002

**State Has or Will Have Graduation Exam**
- WA
- MT
- ND
- OR
- NV
- CA
- ID
- WY
- UT
- AZ
- CO
- NM
- SD
- NE
- KS
- TX
- OK
- AR
- LA
- MS
- AL
- GA
- SC
- NC
- VA
- PA
- MI
- OH
- KY
- MS
- TN
- WI
- IL
- IN
- OH
- WV
- VA
- DE
- MD
- RI
- CT
- VT
- NH
- ME
- MA
- NJ
- NY
- AK
- HI

**State Requires Local Districts to Use Assessments to Determine Whether Student Receives high School Diploma**

- States shaded with a solid pattern indicate states that have or will have graduation exams.
- States shaded with a dotted pattern indicate states that require local districts to use assessments to determine whether a student receives a high school diploma.
Diploma Options

Several options available for all students, and some just for students with disabilities. Meaning of different options is not always clear

- Standard diploma
- IEP/Special education diploma
- Certificate of achievement
Diploma Options - more

- Certificate of attendance
- Occupational diploma
- Modified diploma

Hidden Issue: Standard diplomas may be obtained under very different conditions, yet be treated as though they are the same
State Ranks – Graduation Rates 2002-2003
(NCSEAM – www.monitoringcenter.lsuhscl.edu)

Top 10 Graduation Rate States (Standard Diploma)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using Multiple Diploma Options

Intended:

- Increased numbers of students within a state will be receiving some form of a high school diploma
- Local school districts have more flexibility in determining the manner of student exit
- Creating options that are viewed as motivating and engaging for students with disabilities reduces the dropout rate
Consequences of Using Multiple Diploma Options - cont

Intended:

- Ability to recognize students (typically general education students) for high performance in relation to honors diplomas is increased

- A state is better able to maintain “high” academic standards for its regular or standard diploma when alternative diploma options are available
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using Multiple Diploma Options

Unintended:

- IEP teams fail to hold students with disabilities accountable to pass high school exit exams – expectations are lowered for some students with disabilities
- Alternative diploma options are viewed as substandard
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using Multiple Diploma Options - cont

Unintended:

- There is a perception that the use of multiple diplomas will result in developing “special” tracks for students to follow
- Communicating different options to parents and students is problematic
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using Multiple Diploma Options - cont

Unintended:

• Access to postsecondary education programs for students with diplomas other than the standard diploma is limited if the alternative diploma is viewed as watered down in content or of little meaning to postsecondary education admissions staff.

• Interpreting the meaning of different diploma options in terms of students’ skills and abilities is confusing for employers.
A Few Opinions
State directors of special education

Consequences of Using A Single Diploma Option

Intended:

- More students with disabilities earn a standard diploma
- High expectations for all students, including students with disabilities, are maintained
- Having a single diploma option helps build consistency regarding the meaning of the requirements associated with the diploma – all students work on the same state standards
A Few Opinions

Consequences of Using A Single Diploma Option - cont

Intended:

• The single option provides future employers and postsecondary education institutions a clearer and more detailed record of the student’s performance.

• The single option creates an important sense of equity – all students are extended the same options, tested on the same standards, and viewed by school personnel, as well as community members, as equally participating.
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using A Single Diploma Option

Unintended:

• As graduation requirements increase, fewer students (both general education and special education) actually receive the standard diploma

• The dropout rate may increase if students who cannot meet high standards or who cannot pass statewide tests opt to drop out
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using A Single Diploma Option - cont

Unintended:

- The standard diploma may become perceived as too general and watered down

- In order to help students with disabilities to meet the requirement for a standard diploma, states may be lowering their overall standards for general education students
A Few Opinions

State directors of special education

Consequences of Using A Single Diploma Option - cont

Unintended:

- The numbers of special education students remaining in school up through age 21 may be increased because they cannot meet all of the requirement for the standard diploma earlier
What do the data tell us?

Massachusetts has been reporting its graduation exam data in ways that make it easy to see what is happening for subgroups with retesting, and across years.
Percent of Students who earned a Competency Determination - Class of 2003

Percent with CD

Students with Disabilities

Regular Education

Grade 10 Test

Retest 1

Retest 2

Retest 3

Retest 4+5

Retest 6

Percent with Disabilities

Regular Education
Percent of Students who earned a Competency Determination - Class of 2004

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Grade 10 Test Retest 1 Retest 2 Retest 3 Retest 4

Students with Disabilities

Regular Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 10 Test</th>
<th>Retest 1</th>
<th>Retest 2</th>
<th>Retest 3</th>
<th>Retest 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 %pts</td>
<td>27 %pts</td>
<td>21 %pts</td>
<td>14 %pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with CD</td>
<td>32 %pts</td>
<td>58 %pts</td>
<td>67 %pts</td>
<td>75 %pts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students with Disabilities:

- 45% points (Grade 10 Test)
- 27% points (Retest 1)
- 21% points (Retest 2)
- 14% points (Retest 3)

Regular Education:

- 77% points (Grade 10 Test)
- 90% points (Retest 1)
- 94% points (Retest 2)
- 96% points (Retest 3)
- 98% points (Retest 4)
Percent of Special Education Students Attaining the Competency Determination (through the May 2004 MCAS)
Evidence-Based Practices

Donahue Institute Study

(University of Massachusetts, http://www.donahue.umassp.edu/)

Study identified urban districts and schools that demonstrated better than expected MCAS achievement among students with special needs.
Focus Efforts

- Standards-based instruction
- Turning around low-performing schools
- Evidence-based practices for achievement and dropout prevention
Donahue Institute Study

Practices identified as central to the success of urban districts and schools

1. Pervasive emphasis on curriculum alignment with the MA frameworks
2. Effective systems to support curriculum alignment
3. Emphasis on inclusion and access to the curriculum
Practices central to the success of urban districts and schools

4. Culture and practices that support high standards and student achievement

5. Well disciplined academic and social environment

6. Use of student assessment data to inform decision making
Donahue Institute Study

Practices central to the success of urban districts and schools

7. Unified practice supported by targeted professional development

8. Access to resources to support key initiatives

9. Effective staff recruitment, retention, and deployment
Donahue Institute Study

Practices central to the success of urban districts and schools

10. Flexible leaders and staff that work effectively in a dynamic environment

11. Effective leadership is essential to success