



# THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

*A high-quality education system that prepares all students for college, career, and life.*

<b>Title:</b>	<b>The Role of Assessment in a Career- and College-Ready Diploma Framework</b>	
<b>As Related To:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Goal One: Develop and support policies to close the achievement and opportunity gaps. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Two: Develop comprehensive accountability, recognition, and supports for students, schools, and districts.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal Three: Ensure that every student has the opportunity to meet career and college ready standards. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Four: Provide effective oversight of the K-12 system. <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<b>Relevant To Board Roles:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy Leadership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> System Oversight <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Convening and Facilitating
<b>Policy Considerations / Key Questions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the Board’s legislative priority on assessments need to be refined or updated?</li> <li>• How does the state’s experience of new assessments inform the Board’s priorities moving forward?</li> </ul>	
<b>Possible Board Action:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Approve	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<b>Materials Included in Packet:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Graphs / Graphics <input type="checkbox"/> Third-Party Materials <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint	
<b>Synopsis:</b>	<p>At the September 2015 Board meeting, members requested more information on assessments and further discussion of assessments at the November 2015 meeting as part of the development of the Board’s 2016 legislative priorities.</p> <p>Staff created a presentation (<a href="https://prezi.com/8las8tzffy71/assessment-system/">https://prezi.com/8las8tzffy71/assessment-system/</a>) sent to members prior to the November meeting. Questions and responses from members will be captured and summarized at the Board meeting as a starting point for the Board discussion.</p> <p>Additional questions and responses about exit exams are presented in the attached memo.</p>	



## THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN A CAREER- AND COLLEGE-READY DIPLOMA FRAMEWORK

### Policy Considerations

The state is in the midst of transitioning from state tests in reading, writing, math and science, to new Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and math, and eventually science tests based on the Next Generation Science Standards. This academic year will see the second full administration of Smarter Balanced tests. In high school, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will take the ELA test, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students will take the Smarter Balanced math test.

State testing is receiving a lot of attention from the public, students and parents, educators, and elected officials. Bills concerning assessment are likely to be considered in the upcoming legislative session. At the November board meeting, the Board will be developing legislative priorities for the 2016 session. The Board has existing positions on assessments to guide legislative priorities concerning assessments. Considerations of the Board at the November 2015 meeting include:

- Does the Board's legislative priority on assessments need to be refined or updated?
- How does the state's experience of new assessments inform the Board's priorities moving forward?

### Background

At the September 2015 board meeting, members requested more information on assessments and further discussion of assessments at the November 2015 meeting. Based on general discussion at the September meeting, staff identified six topics concerning assessment on which to provide additional information and a framework for discussion:

1. Exit exams
2. Graduation score on exit exams
3. Alternatives to meeting the graduation score on exit exams
4. Grade of administration of exit exams
5. Science assessments
6. Phase-out of the former system of assessments

A presentation (<https://prezi.com/8las8tzffy71/assessment-system/>) was sent to members on October 13, 2015, with an overview of issues concerning these topics. On October 16, a work tool was sent to members to help members record additional questions, take notes, and formulate their ideas on assessment topics. Staff will compile information from the tool and summarize member questions and responses. The summary will be included in the additional meeting materials.

For an overview of current state law on the transition to new assessments and past work of the Board on assessments, members may review [meeting materials](#) prepared for the August 5, 2015 Board meeting.

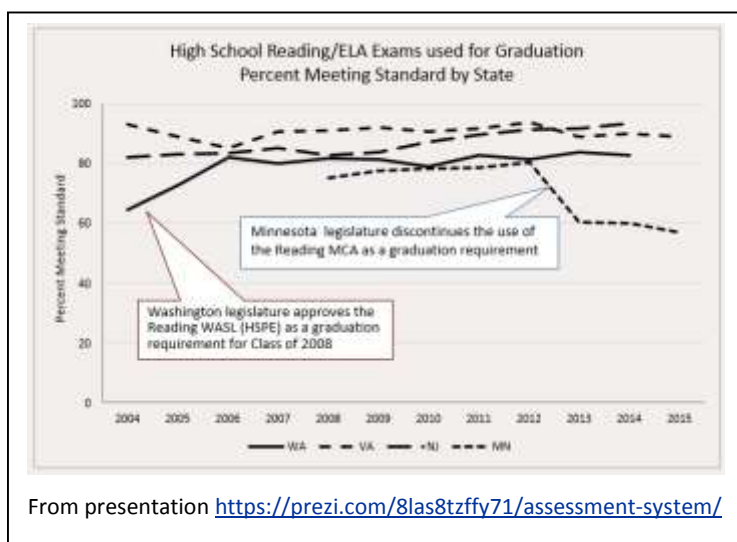


## Additional Questions and Answers About Exit Exams

At the September Board meeting members had questions about exit exams and requested additional information from reports and studies. Staff reviewed multiple sources on the topic, producing the following questions and responses as a deeper look at exit exams. These questions and responses are based on an overview of some of the relevant literature and do not represent an exhaustive review of all sources on this complex topic.

### *What are the purposes of exit exams?*

Exit exams are for system, school and student accountability. About half of states tie exams to graduation in some way. Generally, exit exams are linked to the concept of a meaningful diploma and the demonstration of a base of knowledge and skills for all students who graduate (Hyslop, 2014 and Achieve, 2014). Exit exams are also used as part of comprehensive state accountability systems. Work of the Legislature, OSPI, and the Board's work with the Achievement Index, the Accountability Framework, and Required Action Districts display a commitment by the state to Washington's accountability system.



From presentation <https://prezi.com/8las8tzffv71/assessment-system/>

When high school standardized tests are de-linked from graduation, student performance tends to decline as is shown in the chart used in the presentation sent to members.

High school exit exams measure the high school achievement gap, and are an indication of opportunity gaps. Exit exam results are critical to tracking opportunity gaps.

New standards and assessments aligned to career and college readiness permit high school exit exams to be more indicative of readiness for college. The agreement of Washington's institutions

of higher education to use the Smarter Balanced test results for college course placement indicates an acceptance by institutions of higher education that these exams are a valid indication of readiness for college-level work.

### *Do exit exams improve student achievement?*

Generally, studies do not indicate that exit exams by themselves affect student achievement, and there is not a consensus on their value (Hyslop, 2014). Data and research are mixed (Holme et. al, 2010), and results may be confounded by the different types of exit exams and the range of ways states administer and use exit exams. They are also complicated by differences in school, district and state policies and by changing policies. A September 2015 "Ask A REL" research request made to the Northwest Regional Educational Lab found that in summary, studies and reviews from the past 10 years did not find that exit exams impacted academic achievement, either positively or negatively.

While exit exams alone generally do not improve student achievement, assessment and accountability systems have been found to help improve student achievement. (Cowen and Winters, 2012; Bishop and Mane, 2002; Hanushek and Raymond, 2004). The Board has been very engaged in Washington's accountability system, a system intended to provide a unified system of support for challenged schools with increasing levels of support based on the magnitude of need. Washington's system has shown significant successes in raising the achievement of students based on state assessments including exit

exams (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, [Office of Student and School Success Update: SIG, RAD, Priority and Focus Schools](#)).

*Are exit exam results simply a proxy for family income?*

While there is a widely documented correlation between family income and standardized test results (Holme et. al, 2010; [Nation's Report Card](#)), demographics cannot replace assessment results. Schools in poor communities where the students do well on assessments are of interest to the Board because beneficial practices at such schools may be transferable to other schools. It is also critical to the accountability system to identify schools that are not doing well no matter their demographics, so they can get the support they need.

At the student level, measures other than test results such as course grades can provide information for student accountability. But again, looking at data that do not conform to the trend is valuable. Consider students who progress in school but who do not meet standard on their exit exams, or students who do well on the exams but are not progressing in school; either situation merits a closer look at the students' circumstances to safeguard against systemic opportunity gaps. Washington has an extremely varied educational system, with very large and very small districts, urban and rural districts, districts composed of mainly wealthy communities as well as districts that serve low-income communities. In view of such differences, standardized tests results provide a useful check on the equitability of the system.

*Do exit exams negatively impact the graduation rate or the dropout rate?*

Studies on the graduation and dropout rates associated with exit exams are mixed. In Washington the graduation rate does not appear to have been impacted by exit exams. An annual independent study of California's exit exams have identified a moderate increase in the graduation rate associated with the state's exit exam (Wise, et al., 2014). Caves and Balestra (2014) also found that exit exams had an overall positive effect on graduation rate trends. However, studies have also linked exit exams to the severity of the dropout problem, with students in poverty, English language learners, and ethnic minorities most impacted (Ou, 2010).

OSPI Assistant Superintendent Robin Munson [presented on assessments](#) at the September 2014 Board meeting and shared data showing little impact on graduation rates in Washington since assessments required for graduation were introduced. Data on student groups who access assessment alternatives (included in a section of this Board packet) show that traditionally underserved populations are disproportionately represented among students who use alternatives to meet the assessment requirement, showing that these populations of students are less successful in demonstrating proficiency through the standardized exit exam.

Helmet and Marcotte (2013) found a dropout effect associated with exit exams for some student groups, and that the effects are uniformly larger in states that do not provide alternatives pathways to a diploma.

*What are the public's view of assessments and standardized tests and exit exams?*

Several education polls with questions about assessments have been released recently. None of the polls specifically address exit exams, but all of them ask about parents' and the public's views of standardized tests. The poll results suggest that parents are more divided on testing than in the past, but with a majority of parents remaining in support of using standardized tests.

[Gallup poll:](#)

70% of public school parents said that using tests standardized tests to measure what students have learned is very important or somewhat important.

### Education Next:

66% of parents completely or somewhat support the federal government continuing to require that all students be tested in math and reading each year in grades 3-8 and once in high school.

### Educationpost:

44% said standardized tests were a fair assessment of how students perform in math and English as opposed to 38% who said they were unfair (18% not sure); 44% said standardized tests are a positive thing for education overall, as opposed to 30% who said they were negative (25% were not sure).

### *Do exit exams contribute to over-testing?*

Washington high school exit exams are also the exams used for federal accountability, so they are not additional tests that students must take. If the high school exams were not tied to graduation, students would still be required to take the exams.

The system of high school exit exams and their alternatives, especially during the transition to the new assessments, represent a significant scheduling challenge for schools and districts, according to a number of districts who have communicated with staff. All 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students take the state exams in the spring, while many students in 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade will take retakes and alternatives. Many students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade also take voluntary tests, such as Advanced Placement, SAT or ACT. The Smarter Balanced assessment could, in time, replace some voluntary tests if institutions of higher education grow to trust and use Smarter Balanced test results for college admission and placement decisions.

Reports on testing (Teoh et. al, 2014) indicate that the amount of time students spend on state standardized tests is about 1 to 2 percent of the total annual time in school, as shown in this [Highline testing infographic](#) for parents and students. Contributing to the perception of over-testing are district required tests. Local testing typically involves two to three times as much testing as is required by the state (Lazarin, 2014).

### *What are some key considerations on exit exams?*

Research and reports about exit exams show advantages and disadvantages of exit exams. Collectively the research and reports do not provide a clear, data-informed roadmap for the use and implementation of assessments required for high school graduation. A combination of politics, beliefs and values influence decisions about assessments, as they do for many aspects of the educational system. These influences are valid considerations for policy-makers, but are difficult to weigh particularly on a polarized issue such as assessments. Key considerations for Board discussion include:

- How can high school assessments be meaningful and robust without making them roadblocks to student success?
- Is there middle ground to explore between requiring all students to pass exit exams and eliminating an assessment graduation requirement?

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## **Action**

Board members will discuss exit exams and the high school assessment system at the November 2015 Board meeting, and may modify or update the Board's legislative priority on assessments.

If you have questions regarding this memo, please contact Linda Drake at [linda.drake@k12.wa.us](mailto:linda.drake@k12.wa.us).