



NEWS RELEASE

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New Report Examines Local Impact of High School Exit Exams

Case Studies Track Effects of Exams on Classroom Behavior in Two Anonymous Districts – One Each in Maryland and Virginia

WASHINGTON – June 9, 2005 – A new report tracking the local implementation of state high school exit exams – now required for graduation in 19 states – reveals a first look at how the tests are changing behavior of students, teachers and administrators in America's high schools.

As part of its multi-year national study of state exit examination policies intended to help policymakers and the public better understand the impact of the tests, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted case studies tracking local implementation of exit tests in two anonymous school districts – one each in Maryland and Virginia. Virginia currently requires students to pass an exam to graduate. Maryland is currently phasing in this requirement.

"This report is the first to provide some perspective on how these exams have changed the high school experience for students and have changed schools," says Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP. "With so many students taking these exams, it is critical that policymakers understand the impact that these reforms have at the local level."

Based on extensive confidential interviews with students, teachers and administrators in each district, the report – *How have High School Exams Changed Our Schools? Some Perspectives from Virginia and Maryland* – finds that the exams have had a "noticeable impact," leading to significant changes in instructional content and methods, allocation of resources, staffing patterns, and school climate.

Benefits of the exams – which will be mandatory for roughly seven in ten high school students nationwide by 2009, including eight in ten minority students – include greater focus on student performance, increased teacher cooperation (including special education teachers), and closer ties between instruction and curriculum, according to the report.

Drawbacks include a decreased emphasis on higher-level skills, less time for subjects not covered on the exams, and a push to cover more content with less depth. Other key findings include the following:

- Teachers and principals – even those who disagree with the exit exam policy – seem committed to helping students pass the exams.

- Educators spend more time emphasizing topics and skills likely to be tested and on test-taking skills, bringing greater focus to instruction but potentially inhibiting more in-depth learning and time for non-tested topics.
- While students are generally aware of the exam requirements and remediation options, some did not know about key aspects including the content likely to be covered on the tests.
- Schools have changed staffing patterns to assign some of their strongest teachers to teach tested subjects and to make staff available for remediation.
- Districts devote the most time and energy to in-school remediation and test prep classes, rather than after-school or summer school programs.
- Districts emphasized the need for more resources to cover additional costs related to exit exams.

In August, the Center will release its annual national report on the status of high school exit exams across the nation. The 2005 report will include a special focus on the exams' impact on English language learners, who represent one of the fastest-growing populations of students affected by the exams.

The report, *How have High School Exams Changed Our Schools? Some Perspectives from Virginia and Maryland*, can be found online at <http://www.cep-dc.org/highschool/exit/change>. Other research and reports from the Center, including CEP's previous annual reports on state high school exit exams, are also available at the Center's Web site: www.cep-dc.org.

Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in 1995, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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