



NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED: Not for Release before 12:01 a.m. EDT, August 13, 2008

CONTACT: Kari Hudnell at (202) 955-9450 ext. 324 or khudnell@communicationworks.com
Chloe Louvouezo at (202) 955-9450 ext. 320 or clouvouezo@communicationworks.com

Fourteen States Plan to Link End-of-Course Exams To High School Graduation by 2015

*States Credit Greater Accountability and Alignment to Growing Trend;
Lack of Research Exists on Effectiveness*

WASHINGTON — August 13, 2008 — In its seventh annual report on high school exit exams, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) finds that exit exams continue to have a significant impact on American education. By 2012, 74 percent of the nation's public school students in 26 states will be required to pass an exit exam to graduate, according to the report. In a shift from recent testing policy, however, more of these students will be required to take end-of-course exams as states move away from comprehensive and minimum competency tests, the report adds.

The report, *State High School Exit Exams: A Move Toward End-of-Course Exams*, found that only one state (Washington) has added a state-mandated exit exam since 2007 and three more states (Arkansas, Maryland, and Oklahoma) will do so by 2012. The impact of exit exams is most striking for students of color. Today, 75 percent of students of color attend public schools in states that require exit exams to graduate; that percentage will rise to 84 percent by 2012.

The report also documents a growing trend by states to move toward end-of-course exams, which usually are standards-based and assess mastery of specific course content. In 2002, only two states used end-of-course exams. That number rose to four states in 2007-08. By 2015, 11 states will rely on end-of-course exams and three more will implement dual testing systems that include end-of-course exams. By contrast, minimum-competency tests, which generally focus on basic skills below the high school level, are becoming less common and will be phased out in all 26 states with exit exams by 2015. The 14 states that will use end-of-course exams by 2015 are: Arkansas, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

In surveys and interviews conducted for the report, state education officials reported many reasons for adopting end-of-course exams. Almost all states that have adopted or are moving toward end-of-course exams reported that they are doing so to improve overall accountability, increase academic rigor, and to achieve alignment between state standards and curriculum.

"States say they are moving toward end-of-course exams because the tests make more sense in terms of alignment with existing high school curriculum," said Jack Jennings, CEP president and CEO. "However, to understand the full impact of end-of-course exams, we need more detailed studies about implementation issues and how the exams affect student outcomes, curriculum, teaching, and performance by specific student groups."

The report notes that major challenges still exist around the adoption and implementation of end-of-course exams, such as managing the tight timelines required to develop multiple exams or figuring out how to get exam results back to school districts quickly. Other challenges reported include addressing concerns about the length and frequency of testing and offering remediation for students who do not pass the exams.

Administrators and officials say that another advantage of end-of-course exams is that they can use the results to make more informed decisions about how to deliver interventions to students and improve professional development for teachers. At the same time, most reported that they do not use the end-of-course exams – or exit exams in general – to ensure college- and work-readiness.

Several lessons learned about end-of-course exams are outlined in the report. For example, both state education officials and district administrators stressed the importance of implementing end-of-course exams over time. They also encourage the inclusion of teachers and other stakeholders in the adoption process, starting with solid academic standards, and offering training and professional development to prepare for end-of-course exams.

The report also examined the legal challenges to exit exams in Arizona and California. These types of challenges, among other things, have prompted many states to expand their alternative paths to graduation. All of the 23 states that currently have state-mandated exit exams offer alternative measures for students with disabilities, but only three offer such measures specifically for English language learners. When asked for the percentages of students completing high school using alternative measures, only about half of the states reported they track and collect this data, making it difficult to know how many students are actually affected by alternative measures.

“It appears that, with few exceptions, alternative measures affect a very small percentage of students overall,” Jennings said. “Still, with only about half of states able to tell us how many students graduated in 2007 using alternative paths, it is clear that we need to improve how we track these students so that we can better understand how to serve them.”

State High School Exit Exams: A Move Toward End-of-Course Exams, individual state profiles, previous reports, and other information from CEP are available online at www.cep-dc.org.

###

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995 and founded by Jack Jennings, 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 special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.