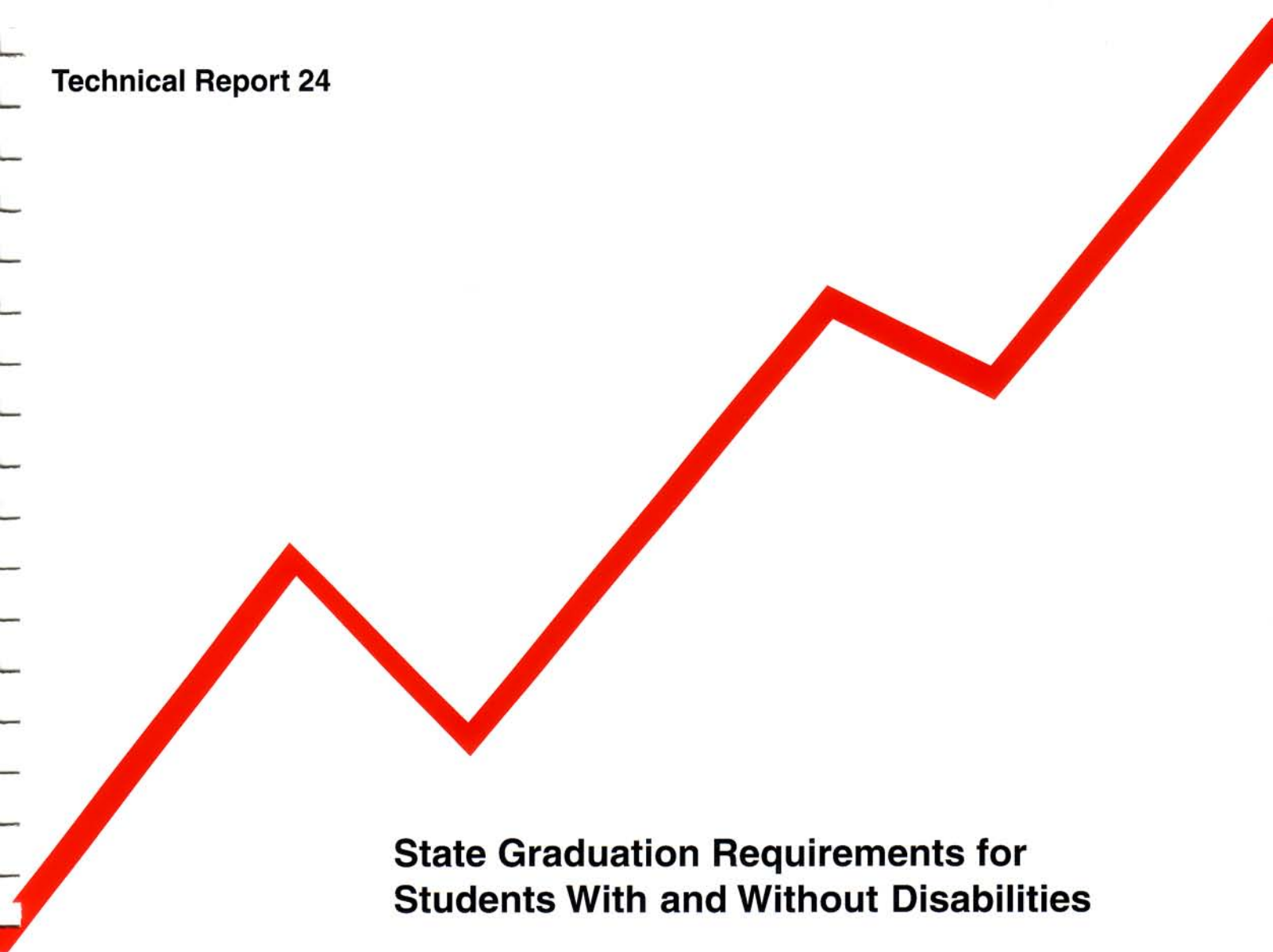


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## State Graduation Requirements for Students With and Without Disabilities



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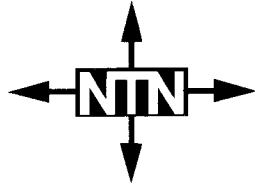
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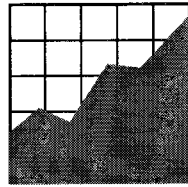
**State Graduation Requirements for Students  
With and Without Disabilities**

Barbara Guy • Hyeonsook Shin • Sun-Young Lee • Martha L. Thurlow

**April, 1999**



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## Executive Summary

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The study reported here was a collaborative effort of the National Transition Network (NTN) and the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO). Its purpose was to document current requirements for graduation, at the same time noting the types of exit options available to students with and without disabilities. Information was collected via surveys. The respondents were state assessment directors and transition specialists from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Survey results revealed a wide array of graduation requirement policies across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The complexity in state policies is multiplied many times over when considering what students with disabilities must do to earn an exit document of one kind or another. The complexity of the system exists in more than just the requirements that students must meet to earn a standard diploma. It begins with the array of exit options that students have available to them (e.g., certificates of completion, IEP diplomas, honors diplomas), and the specific requirements that must be met to earn each of those types of documents. Further, the source of graduation requirements varies, with some states having everything set at the state level, others having everything set at the local level, and many states with a variety of combinations in between. For students with disabilities, the complexities are increased by the existence of exit options not available to students without disabilities (such as the IEP diploma), and by the possibility of modifications in requirements or even exemption from requirements that students without disabilities must meet to receive the same exit document.

Despite the complexities, however, it is possible to reach some general conclusions about graduation requirements for students with and without disabilities. These conclusions have important implications for students' educational outcomes, particularly for students with disabilities.

- A wide array of exit options are available to students in most states.
- States have raised and are continuing to raise their requirements for graduation.
- States that allow flexibility for students with disabilities in meeting graduation requirements tend to provide that flexibility in multiple ways.
- Modified coursework to meet course credit requirements is the most common type of change provided to students with disabilities.
- IEP completion is not a universally accepted way for students with disabilities to meet graduation requirements.

- States with graduation exams generally had more exit options available to students, but less flexibility in how standard diploma requirements could be met.
- The current status of states in documenting the participation and performance of students with disabilities on exit exams suggests that states are going to have a difficult time meeting some of the requirements of the 1997 amendments to IDEA.
- The different responses of assessment directors and transition specialists reflect more than just differences in policies for students with disabilities and other students.

Changes in graduation requirements are pushing the educational system to figure out a better way to meet the needs of all students. At this time, however, not enough is known about the consequences of these changes. Unfortunately, the variability that exists within the states limits the feasibility of a comprehensive, national study of the facts of different exit options and policies. Yet, there are some clear recommendations that policymakers should consider as they set policies for graduation requirements.

- Specify the assumptions underlying graduation policies.
- Ensure that graduation requirements reflect the variety of knowledge and skills that students are learning in school and will need after high school.
- Consider the impact that leaving high school without a regular diploma will have on the opportunities available to students after high school.
- Allow plenty of time for changes in requirements to be phased into place.
- Make high school graduation decisions on the basis of multiple, relevant sources of information about students' knowledge and skills.

These recommendations, and others that might be generated for a given state context, can form the foundation of policies that are more appropriate for students with disabilities and for other at-risk students.

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## Overview

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Recent attention to the effectiveness and quality of public education has resulted in federal and state efforts to improve curriculum content, instructional practices, and student performance. Federal legislation such as Goals 2000, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), which supports Title I programs, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act has encouraged the development of high content standards and the implementation of procedures that account for improved student performance. State attempts to improve the effectiveness and quality of public education include the refinement of graduation requirements, establishment of content and performance standards, and implementation of large scale assessments.

The development and implementation of these reform efforts have been difficult to accomplish, in part because of their complexity. Individually, each strategy represents change that involves and affects a variety of student populations and education departments. In addition, the interrelationship of the strategies means that policies and procedures in one area will affect policies and procedures in another area.

The complexity and potential impact of each strategy necessitates the involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders, many of whom have not previously worked together. Unfortunately, stakeholder involvement in many states has varied. Individuals with disabilities, their advocates, and special education organizations typically have not been an integral part of either the development or implementation of these reform efforts (Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform, 1996; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Gutman, & Geenen, 1998). In some states, special education has engaged in parallel discussions and activities (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, in press).

Many changes accompanied the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The changes that require the participation of students in the general education curriculum and in large scale assessments encourage closer alignment of general and special education reform efforts. This alignment becomes critical as states continue to develop, refine, and implement their reform strategies. The policies and procedures that states develop and implement will affect graduation decisions for students with disabilities and, ultimately, their post-school activities. More stringent graduation requirements, for example, may result in a greater number of students who drop out (Langenfeld, Thurlow, & Scott, 1997). For those who choose to leave school without a diploma, post-school choices are limited. Without a high school diploma, students with disabilities are not candidates for military service or formal post-secondary education, and frequently are excluded from high-paying jobs (Lichtenstein & Michaelides, 1993; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993).



The decision of when to graduate and the manner in which to graduate relates directly to the type of high school education that students with disabilities experience. In some cases students must focus on academic requirements in order to receive a general diploma. This limits the time that they can spend on coursework in vocational education, career education, and other experiences that relate to the development of social skills and independent living—all areas of well-documented need for students with disabilities. Increased academic requirements for standard diplomas, then, may additionally decrease the amount of time students with disabilities have to learn other essential skills related to employment, independent living, and social interactions, thus inhibiting their potential for high-wage employment and independent living.

General and special education reform efforts should result in a variety of graduation policies and options that meet the needs of all students. To ensure that this happens and that graduation policies are not conflicting, graduation requirements for students with disabilities should be examined and developed in conjunction with graduation requirements for students without disabilities. Two previous studies (Bodner, Clark, & Mellard, 1987; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Anderson, 1995) provide a foundation from which to examine trends for changes in graduation policies and procedures for students with disabilities. Findings from these studies indicated that the number of states with an explicit total number of credit requirements decreased (from 46 to 44), but the number of credits required for graduation increased in the majority of states that had credit requirements. The number of states that required students to pass graduation exams in order to receive a standard diploma also increased (from 15 to 17), as did the number of states that provided only a standard diploma (from 14 to 19). Unfortunately, in both studies, information on the requirements for students without disabilities was limited to requirements for a standard diploma. In addition, Bodner et al. (1987) reported their data in the aggregate, thus prohibiting analysis of specific state change. Thurlow et al. (1995), however, reported state-by-state data.

The study reported here builds on the work of Thurlow et al. (1995). The respondents targeted for participation in this study were state assessment directors and transition specialists from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Specifically, the purposes of this study were to: (1) provide policymakers information that would help them as they design, implement, and refine reform strategies, and (2) create a data base from which to track changes in policy as reform strategies in general and special education are implemented.

## Method

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The main purpose of this study was to update and clarify the field's knowledge about state high school graduation requirements for students with and without disabilities. The basis for the current study was a survey conducted by Thurlow et al. in 1995, which was used to guide methodological procedures and instrumentation. This permitted a comparison of the two data sets, and thus provided the opportunity to determine changes in policy since 1995.

### Participants

This study included two groups of participants, state assessment directors and transition specialists, from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. State assessment directors were identified through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) list of members of the Association of State Assessment Personnel (ASAP). Systems change projects in transition, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), were used to identify transition specialists. In states with current transition systems change projects, the transition specialists were the project directors. In states with previous projects, the transition specialists were those identified by the state as the primary contact regarding transition. Transition specialists in the five states that had never received a transition systems change project were the directors of special education at the State Departments of Education (or their designees). Their names were taken from the database of directors maintained by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). State assessment directors and transition specialists from all 50 states and the District of Columbia responded (100% response rate).

### Instrumentation

Two surveys were developed to inquire about high school graduation requirements for students with and without disabilities. The first survey, completed by state assessment directors, examined high school graduation requirements in general. The second survey, completed by state transition specialists, examined graduation requirements specific to students with disabilities. Survey questions were developed to align with previous studies and were reviewed by experts not directly involved in this project. The external experts included individuals who were involved in special education and transition services for students with disabilities and individuals working on the development of state-level high school graduation standards. The survey questions were revised on the basis of these external reviews.

The High School Graduation Requirements Survey consisted of a summary table of each state's graduation requirements (from the Thurlow et al. 1995 report and the CCSSO 1998 Web report) and 17 questions. The information in the summary table included course credits in subject areas

(i.e., English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health/Physical Education, Other, Electives), graduation exams, and types of exit options. The respondents then were asked to verify the accuracy of the given information and to correct any inaccurate information. The 17 questions were presented in 3 sections: (1) sources of high school graduation requirements (three questions); (2) examinations required to receive a high school diploma (nine questions); and (3) policy changes (five questions). The survey questions are provided in Appendix A.

The High School Graduation Requirements and Students with Disabilities Survey focused on graduation requirements for students with disabilities. It was a separate survey, consisting of 20 questions presented in four sections: (1) sources of high school graduation requirements (four questions); (2) examinations required to receive a high school diploma (four questions); (3) transition services (five questions); and (4) policy changes (seven questions). On both the general and special education surveys, respondents were asked to skip the questions about exit exams if their state did not have one. Otherwise, they were instructed to answer all questions. The survey questions for the Disabilities Survey are provided in Appendix B.

## Procedures

Information for this study was gathered in two ways. First, surveys were mailed to both sets of respondents. To increase the response rate, follow-up requests were made by fax and telephone. Second, document analysis also was conducted. This was done when states included copies of state documents with their returned surveys. State documentation took the form of state statutes, rules, or regulations from the Department of Education. This information was reviewed to clarify the types of options available for graduation and their specific requirements. Some respondents who did not include documentation were called to clarify written answers. All information was collected between February and August, 1998.

## Results

Survey responses from both state assessment directors and transition specialists are summarized here first in terms of the types of exit options that are available for students with and without disabilities. An overview of the general graduation requirements and their source is followed by a more detailed description of course credits and examinations required for graduation. Changes in graduation policies and procedures then are presented in terms of current survey responses and a comparison of these data with Thurlow et al.'s (1995) survey responses.

## Exit Options

In this section, we describe exit options available to students with and without disabilities. Because various names and requirements were used for exit options in different states, we organized the exit options into five categories: (1) standard diploma (an option granted for satisfaction of course requirements, passage of exit exams, other requirements as identified, or any combination of the three requirements); (2) Individualized Education Program (IEP) diploma (an option available only to students with disabilities who have not met standard diploma requirements, but who have completed IEP goals and objectives); (3) certificate of attendance (an option available to students with disabilities or students without disabilities who have aged out or who have not completed graduation requirements for a standard diploma, an IEP diploma, or both); (4) honors diploma (an option available to students with disabilities or students without disabilities who have met more requirements than those for standard diplomas); and (5) other (options that did not meet criteria of the other four categories).

In each state we surveyed both the assessment director (to obtain information on high school graduation requirements in general) and the transition specialist (to obtain information specific to students with disabilities). The information we obtained from the two respondents within a state was not always the same. For example, assessment directors in 50 states and the District of Columbia identified the standard diploma as an exit option for students in general, whereas the transition specialist in one state (Massachusetts) did not identify this as an exit option for students with disabilities (see Table 1) because LEAs determine exit options for students with disabilities. Transition specialists also did not indicate that the certificate of attendance was available to students with disabilities in two of the states with this option (Florida, Hawaii). Transition specialists indicated that honors diplomas were available to students with disabilities in only 3 of the 12 states with this exit option (Alabama, Indiana, New York).

Because of the occasional discrepancies between options identified by assessment directors and transition specialists, we have based this summary on the most comprehensive data available (i.e., options identified by either respondent, as reflected in Table 1). Since there were discrepancies in responses of the two groups, this information would look slightly different if it was based on the information from just one respondent. Points of agreement and disagreement about exit options are shown in Appendix C.

Every state had standard diplomas as one exit option for both students with and without disabilities (see Table 1). Nearly half or more of the states also had exit options that were IEP-based ( $n = 24$ ) or that were based on school attendance ( $n = 31$ ). About one-fourth of states had some form of honors diploma, and another one-fourth had other exit options such as occupational diplomas, local diplomas, adult diplomas, and General Education Development (GED) diplomas. Five states (Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia) identified the GED diploma as

**Table 1. Exit Options Available in Each State**

State	Standard Diploma	IEP Diploma	Certificate of Attendance	Honors Diploma	Other Options <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	✓	✓	✓ +	✓	✓
Alaska	✓	✓ +	✓		
Arizona	✓				
Arkansas	✓	✓ +	✓ +		
California	✓			✓ -	
Colorado	✓	✓ +			✓ +
Connecticut	✓	✓ +	✓ +		✓ -
Delaware	✓		✓		
Florida	✓	✓	✓ -	✓ -	
Georgia	✓	✓	✓		
Hawaii	✓	✓ +	✓ -	✓ -	
Idaho	✓				
Illinois	✓		✓ +		
Indiana	✓			✓	✓ +
Iowa	✓	✓			
Kansas	✓				✓ -
Kentucky	✓	✓ +		✓ -	
Louisiana	✓		✓		
Maine	✓	✓ +			
Maryland	✓	✓ +	✓		✓ +
Massachusetts <sup>b</sup>	✓ -				
Michigan	✓	✓ +	✓		
Minnesota	✓				
Mississippi	✓		✓		
Missouri	✓		✓	✓ -	
Montana	✓	✓ +			
Nebraska	✓		✓ +		✓ -
Nevada	✓	✓	✓ +		✓ -
New Hampshire	✓	✓ +	✓		
New Jersey	✓				
New Mexico	✓	✓ +	✓ +		✓ +
New York	✓	✓	✓ +	✓	✓ -
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓ -	
North Dakota	✓	✓ +	✓ +		
Ohio	✓			✓ -	✓ -
Oklahoma	✓				
Oregon	✓		✓		
Pennsylvania	✓				✓ +
Rhode Island	✓				
South Carolina	✓		✓ +		
South Dakota	✓				
Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓ -	
Texas	✓		✓ +		
Utah	✓		✓ +		
Vermont	✓		✓ +		
Virginia	✓	✓ +	✓	✓ -	✓
Washington	✓				
West Virginia	✓	✓			
Wisconsin	✓		✓ +		
Wyoming	✓		✓ +		
District of Columbia	✓	✓ +	✓ +		
Total #	51	24	31	12	13

*Note.* Exit options with minus marks (✓ -) were identified only by assessment directors (i.e., not by transition specialists). Exit options with plus marks (✓ +) were identified only by transition specialists (i.e., not by assessment directors). Exit options without marks (✓) were identified by both assessment directors and transition specialists.

<sup>a</sup> Other exit options include an occupational diploma (Alabama), a work/study diploma (Colorado), a GED diploma (Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia), a certificate of achievement for special education students for whom a diploma track is not appropriate (Indiana), a locally-determined modified diploma (Nebraska), a career readiness diploma (New Mexico), an annotated local diploma (New York), an adult diploma (Nevada), a diploma of adult education (Ohio), a special diploma (Virginia), and a locally determined diplomas (Kansas).

<sup>b</sup> Data may be incomplete (LEAs determine exit options for students with disabilities).

an exit option. Occupational or work/study diplomas were available in three states (Alabama, Colorado, New Mexico). In Virginia, special diplomas were also available. In Kansas and Nebraska, locally-determined diplomas were options delineated by the states. Indiana offered a certificate of achievement to students with disabilities for whom a diploma track program was not appropriate. Nevada offered adult diplomas, and Ohio offered diplomas of adult education. In New York, annotated local diplomas were also identified as an exit option.

Table 2 summarizes the arrays of exit options available in each state. Across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the most common array of options was a standard diploma combined with a certificate of attendance (n = 11). A standard diploma as the only option for exit from school was the next most frequently available option (n = 9). The next most common array (n = 7) was a standard diploma combined with an IEP diploma and a certificate of attendance. Each of the other arrays was available in fewer than five states. Still, the total number of states, including the District of Columbia, that had options beyond just the standard diploma was 42.

Many states used the term *certificate* in the exit options available to students with disabilities. The special names of these certificates are shown in Table 3 (note that these certificates fall in either the categories *certificate of attendance* or *IEP diploma* in Table 1). For example, 22 states offered a certificate of attendance to students with disabilities; 5 offered a certificate of completion; 2 offered a graduation certificate; and 2 offered a certificate of achievement. Still other states offered certificates with different names. The District of Columbia offered a certificate of attainment and a certificate of IEP. Kentucky offered a certificate of program completion of IEP to students with moderate or severe cognitive disabilities upon completion of IEP goals and objectives. Florida offered a special certificate of completion. Arkansas offered a certificate of completion of IEP. In Maryland, a high school certificate was awarded only to students with disabilities who did not meet the requirements for a standard diploma.

## General Graduation Requirements

In this section, we describe the general nature of graduation requirements, and the level(s) at which these requirements are set (e.g., state, local). First, we describe graduation requirements and their sources in general. Then, we summarize changes in graduation requirements for students with disabilities. In subsequent sections we examine specific requirements for course credits and graduation exams, and identify the sources of the requirements.

Requirements for earning a high school diploma are of three types: (1) earn a certain number of course credits, (2) pass some form of a graduation exam, and (3) meet both course credits and graduation exam requirements. Table 4 shows the requirements that states have for students to receive a standard diploma. The largest number of states (n = 27) required completion of course

**Table 2. Arrays of Exit Options Available in Each State**

<b>Exit Options</b>	<b>Number of States Offering</b>	<b>States</b>
Standard diploma only	9	Arizona, Idaho, Massachusetts <sup>a</sup> , Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington
Standard diploma + IEP diploma	4	Iowa, Maine, Montana, West Virginia
Standard diploma + Certificate of attendance	11	Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin, Wyoming
Standard diploma + Honors diploma	1	California
Standard diploma + Other diploma	2	Kansas, Pennsylvania
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Certificate of attendance	7	Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Dakota, District of Columbia
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Honors diploma	1	Kentucky
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Other diploma	1	Colorado
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Certificate of attendance + Honors diploma	4	Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, Tennessee
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Certificate of attendance + Other diploma	4	Connecticut, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico
Standard diploma + Certificate of attendance + Honors diploma	1	Missouri
Standard diploma + Certificate of attendance + Other diploma	1	Nebraska
Standard diploma + Honors diploma + Other diploma	2	Indiana, Ohio
Standard diploma + IEP diploma + Certificate of attendance + Honors diploma + Other diploma	3	Alabama, New York, Virginia

<sup>a</sup>Exit options for students with disabilities are determined by LEAs.

**Table 3. Names of Certificates Available to Students with Disabilities**

<b>Certificate Option</b>	<b>Number of States Offering</b>	<b>States</b>
Certificate of Attendance	22	Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming
Certificate of Completion	5	Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, New Mexico, Utah
Graduation Certificate	2	Alabama, North Carolina
Certificate of Achievement	2	Indiana, North Carolina
Certificate of Attainment	1	District of Columbia
Certificate of IEP	1	District of Columbia
Certificate of Program Completion of IEP	1	Kentucky
Special Certificate of Completion	1	Florida
Certificate of Completion of IEP	1	Arkansas
High School Certificate	1	Maryland

*Note.* Certificates listed here may fall in either the category of IEP diplomas or Certificates of Attendance in Table 1.

credits. The second largest number of states ( $n = 19$ ) required students to earn a specific number of credits and pass an exam. Just one state (Minnesota) only required its students to pass an exam to earn a standard diploma.

The discretion that local education agencies (LEAs) had in setting graduation requirements varied across states. In three states (Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania), LEAs established their own credit requirements. Additionally, in Iowa, minimum course credit requirements were established by the state; however, additional credits were required by local boards. Massachusetts had statewide credit requirements for certain content areas, but LEAs decided credits for other content areas. For example, the Massachusetts state department of education established credit requirements for Social Studies and Health/Physical Education and LEAs determined credit requirements for the remaining content areas. In Nebraska, the state required a total of 200



**Table 4. Standard Diploma Requirements**

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Number of States</b>	<b>States</b>
Credits Only	27	Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa <sup>a</sup> , Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts <sup>b</sup> , Missouri, Montana, Nebraska <sup>b</sup> , North Dakota, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming
Credits + Exit Exam	19	Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia
Exit Exam Only	1	Minnesota <sup>c</sup>
LEA Determination	3	Colorado <sup>d</sup> , Michigan <sup>e,f</sup> , Pennsylvania <sup>f</sup>
Other	1	California <sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> In Iowa, state-level minimum credit requirements exist; however, each local board establishes additional requirements.

<sup>b</sup> In Massachusetts and Nebraska, part of the credit requirements or the distribution of credits are left to the discretion of LEAs.

<sup>c</sup> Minnesota previously required credits only. In the future, students will be required to pass an exit exam and demonstrate mastery of 24 standards.

<sup>d</sup> In Colorado, state-level requirements for graduation do not exist. LEAs set their own credit requirements and may use some form of exams.

<sup>e</sup> In Michigan, students who meet local requirements for graduation receive local high school diplomas with or without state endorsements. Depending on the performance level on an exit exam, state endorsements will appear on transcripts.

<sup>f</sup> Michigan and Pennsylvania give LEAs the discretion to decide their own credit requirements.

<sup>g</sup> In California, state-mandated credit requirements exist; in addition, LEAs may decide whether they will use some form of exit exams.

credits. The distribution of those 200 credits, however, was decided at the local level, as long as 80% of the credits were in the core curriculum subjects.

In the 20 states that had statewide graduation exams, passing score levels for the exams were all determined by the state. Even in Alaska and the District of Columbia, which were in the process of instituting an exit exam, transition specialists indicated that passing scores would be determined by the state.

Requirements that students with disabilities must meet to earn a standard diploma are summarized in Table 5 in terms of whether changes are allowed in the requirements for students with disabilities. In all states, students with disabilities could meet the same criteria as other students and earn the same standard diploma. Many states, however, had also identified alternate ways in which students with disabilities could earn a standard diploma. The most common alternate route to a standard diploma was to allow modified coursework to count the same as regular coursework ( $n = 23$ ). Completion of IEP goals and objectives also was considered adequate in eight states.

Of the states that had only course credit requirements, there were five that did not allow any changes in requirements for students with disabilities. A certificate option was available to students with disabilities in four states (Alaska, District of Columbia, Nebraska, Oregon) (see Table 1). Two of these states (Alaska, District of Columbia) also had an IEP diploma option available for students with disabilities (see Table 1). Of the states that had both course credit requirements and graduation exams, there were seven that allowed no changes in the requirements for students with disabilities. Each of these had other options for exit documents (again, see Table 1), including IEP diplomas (Alabama, Nevada, North Carolina, Virginia), certificates of attendance (Alabama, Louisiana, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina), and others (e.g., Certificate of Achievement—Indiana).

According to transition specialists, graduation requirements for students with disabilities also were established by state-level policies, but at the same time LEAs were left to determine some specific requirements. For example, although graduation requirements in general were established by the State Education Agency in Wisconsin, diploma requirements for students with disabilities were set by LEAs. In Massachusetts, although a standard diploma was the only exit option for students without disabilities, the exit options available for students with disabilities were determined by LEAs. In Oregon, the state provided minimum requirements and LEAs may add to them and grant certificates for students who have met only part of the requirements. Six states (Colorado, Iowa, Montana, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Wyoming) did not have state requirements for students with disabilities; in these states, LEAs set their own requirements. The transition specialists in three other states (Idaho, Oklahoma, Washington) did not specify whether their graduation requirements were established at the state or local level.

**Table 5. Changes in Requirements for Students with Disabilities to Earn a Standard Diploma**

<b>States with Credit Requirements Only</b>		
<u>Changes Allowed</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>States</u>
None	5	Alaska, District of Columbia, Nebraska, Oregon, Rhode Island
Modified Coursework <sup>a</sup>	16	Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington
IEP Completion	5	Arkansas, Maine, Missouri, Oklahoma, Wyoming
IEP Team or LEA Decision	6	Connecticut, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Utah, Wisconsin
Undefined	1	Kentucky
Other	1	West Virginia <sup>b</sup>
<b>States with Credit Requirements and Graduation Exams</b>		
<u>Changes Allowed</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>States</u>
None	7	Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia
Modified Coursework But Same Exam	4	Florida, Hawaii, New Mexico, New York
Same Coursework But Exemption From Exam	2	New Jersey, Ohio
Modified Coursework and Alternative Exam	1	Texas
IEP Completion	1	Tennessee
IEP Team or LEA Decision	2	Arizona, Maryland
Other	2	Georgia <sup>c</sup> , Mississippi
<b>Remaining States</b>		
<u>Changes Allowed</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>States</u>
Modified Coursework	2	Colorado, Michigan
Modified Exam or Exemption From Exam	1	Minnesota
IEP Completion	2	Minnesota, Pennsylvania
IEP Team or LEA Decision	3	California, Colorado, Pennsylvania

<sup>a</sup> Coursework may be modified as reduced number of credits, credits approved for alternate courses, or lower performance criteria.

<sup>b</sup> Instructional modifications are allowed for students with disabilities.

<sup>c</sup> Waiver from graduation requirements is allowed for students with disabilities.

## Course Credit Requirements

Results from the general education survey indicated that 40 states and the District of Columbia required completion of Carnegie course units, defined as (1) a measure of study time representing 120 hours of classwork completed in one year, (2) five periods of 40 to 60 minutes for at least 36 weeks, or (3) five hours of related work per week (Kapel, Gifford, & Kapel, 1991, p. 87; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992, p. 249). Table 6 presents these data. In the states using Carnegie Units, the actual number of credits required for graduation varied widely from state to state, ranging from 14.5 credits (Vermont) to 24 credits (Alabama, Florida, Hawaii, Utah, West Virginia), distributed among English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health or Physical Education, Arts, Electives, and others.

The 10 states not included in Table 6 either: (1) had different credit unit systems (California, Idaho, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey); (2) left the determination of credits to LEAs (Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania); or (3) did not require course credits (Minnesota) (see Table 7). In California and Massachusetts, course requirements were recorded as the number of years of coursework. In Nebraska, a total of 200 credit hours was required by the state, but LEAs determined the distribution of the total number of credit hours across curricular areas. In Idaho, a total of 42 semester credits was required. In New Jersey, the number of credits required was 110.

## Graduation Exams

In addition to course credits, some states required their students to pass an exit exam before they earn a high school diploma (see Table 8). Overall, 20 states indicated that they had a graduation exam in place on a statewide basis and that their students without disabilities must pass it before they are eligible to receive a standard diploma. A summary of whether students can be exempted from graduation exams and still receive a diploma is provided in Table 9. One state (Arizona) was as yet unsure of its exam requirement policy. According to transition specialists, modifications to the exam requirements were available to students with disabilities in four states (Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas). In three of the four states, the modification was that the students could be exempted from the test and still receive a standard diploma (Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio). Minnesota was the only state that allowed students with disabilities to pass the exit exam with different scores. Only in Texas were students with disabilities who were exempted from the graduation exam required to participate in an alternative assessment.

Table 10 shows more detailed information about graduation exams, including the graduating class for which the exam was first implemented, the grade in which students can first take the

**Table 6. High School Graduation Requirements: Carnegie Units in Curricular Areas**

State	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Health/ P E	Other	Electives	Total
Alabama	4	4	4	4	1	1.5	5.5	24
Alaska	4	2	2	3	1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Arizona	4	2	2	2.5	0	1.5	8	20
Arkansas	4	3	3	3	1	5	3	21
Connecticut	4	3	2	3	1	7	0	20
Delaware	4	2	2	3	1.5	0	6.5	19
Florida	4	3	3	3	1	1	9	24
Georgia <sup>a</sup>	4	4(3)	3	3	1	1	6(7)	22
Hawaii	4	3	3	4	2	2	6	24
Iowa <sup>b</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.5	1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Illinois	3	2	1	2	4.5	1.25	2.25	16
Kansas	4	2	2	3	1	0	9	21
Kentucky	4	3	2	2	1	n/a	8	20(22) <sup>c</sup>
Louisiana	4	3	3	3	2	0	8	23
Maryland	4	3	3	3	1	3	n/a	21
Maine	4	2	2	2	1.5	1	n/a	16
Mississippi	4	2	2	3	.5	0	8.5	20
Missouri	3	2	2	2	1	2	10	22
Montana	4	2	2	2	1	2	7	20
North Carolina	4	3	3	3	1	n/a	6	20
North Dakota	4	2	2	3	1	0	5	17
New Hampshire	4	2	2	2	1.25	1.5	7	19.75
New Mexico	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23
New York	4	2	2	4	2.5	1	5	20.5
Nevada	4	2	2	2	2	.5	8	22.5
Ohio <sup>d</sup>	3(4)	2(3)	1(2-3)	2(3)	1(1)	3(1)	9(7)	18(21)
Oklahoma	4	3	2	2	0	2	8	21
Oregon	3	2	2	3	2	1	9	22
Rhode Island <sup>e</sup>	4(4)	3(2)	2(2)	2(2)	100 min./wk	3(0)	4(6)	18(16)
South Carolina <sup>f</sup>	4(4)	3(4)	2(3)	3(3)	1(1)	0(1)	7(8)	20(24)
South Dakota	4	2	2	3	0	n/a	8	20
Tennessee <sup>g</sup>	4	3	3	3	1	3(4)	3(2)	20
Texas	4	3	2	3	2	2.5	5.5	22
Utah	3	2	2	3	2	2.5	9.5	24
Vermont	4	5	n/a	3	1.5	1	0	14.5
Virginia <sup>h</sup>	4	3(4)	3(4)	3(4)	2	1	6(2)	22(24)
Washington	3	2	2	2.5	2	2	5.5	19
Wisconsin	4	2	2	3	2	0	n/a <sup>i</sup>	n/a <sup>i</sup>
West Virginia	4	3	3	3	2	1	8	24
Wyoming	4	3	3	3	0	0	n/a	n/a
District of Columbia	4	3	3	3.5	1.5	3	n/a	23.5 <sup>j</sup>

Note. n/a = Not available.

<sup>a</sup> Two requirements exist: one for college-prep students and the other for tech-prep students. Credits in parentheses are for tech-prep students.

<sup>b</sup> The state sets credit requirements for accreditation, but each local board establishes graduation requirements.

<sup>c</sup> Total 20 credits are for the 1997-98 year. Total 22 credits are for the 1998-99 year.

<sup>d</sup> Credits in parentheses are new requirements for students who graduate after September 5, 2001 (Section 3313.603 ORC, as enacted in SB 55, 1997).

<sup>e</sup> Two different credit requirements: college-bound and career-bound. Credits for career-bound are in parentheses.

<sup>f</sup> Credit requirements for graduates in 1998, 1999, and 2000 are listed. Credit requirements in parentheses will begin in the year 2000-2001. One credit for "Other" for the year 2000-2001 is for Computer Science.

<sup>g</sup> Credits for other and electives differ for University Prep Curriculum and Technology Prep Curriculum. Credits for Technology Prep Curriculum are in parentheses.

<sup>h</sup> Two credit requirements: Standard and Advanced. Advanced requirements are in parentheses.

<sup>i</sup> Part of the credit requirements are determined by LEAs.

<sup>j</sup> 100-hour community service is also required.

**Table 7. High School Graduation Requirements: Other Credit Units in Curricular Areas**

State	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Health/ P E	Other	Electives	Total
California <sup>a, b</sup>	3	2	2	3	2	1	0	13
Colorado <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>
Idaho <sup>c</sup>	9	4	4	5	1	2	17	42
Indiana	8	4	4	4	2	n/a	16	38
Massachusetts <sup>b</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	1	4	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>
Mississippi <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>
Minnesota <sup>d</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Nebraska <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	200 cr hrs
New Jersey <sup>e</sup>	20	15	10	15	20	7.5	22.5	110
Pennsylvania <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>	n/a <sup>*</sup>

*Note.* n/a = Not available.

<sup>\*</sup> States with asterisks have LEAs determine their course credit requirements.

<sup>a</sup> Five different high school graduation course requirements exist. The State Mandated Requirements (EC51225.3) (1988) are listed here.

<sup>b</sup> The number of years is the unit of course requirements.

<sup>c</sup> The number of semester credits is the unit of course required.

<sup>d</sup> As of Spring 1998, all course credit requirements are under revision. In the future, students will be required to demonstrate mastery of 24 standards.

<sup>e</sup> The number of course credits is the unit.

exam, and content areas covered. Topics included on the exit exams typically were core curricular areas such as English/Language Arts (including reading and writing) and Math.

In addition to the states listed in Table 10, three (Alaska, District of Columbia, Massachusetts) had graduation exams pending for future years. Assessment directors in another three states (California, Colorado, Illinois) indicated that administration of some type of exit exam was an LEA decision. Indications of pending exams were evident in other states. For example, Delaware's state assessment director indicated that there was no statewide graduation exam requirement in place. The transition specialist, however, reported that students with disabilities were required to pass an exam to obtain a high school diploma. The difference in responses was most likely due to impending changes in the state law that were not yet implemented.

In nearly all states with statewide graduation exams, students were allowed to have multiple opportunities to pass the exams. Any students who failed the graduation exam were allowed to take another form of the exam in 15 states (Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia) or retake the exam several times in five states (Hawaii, Maryland, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas).

Twenty states with graduation exams had different policies on how to implement the exams and

**Table 8. High School Graduation Requirements: Graduation Exams**

State	Required to pass for a high school diploma?		Graduation Exam
	Students without Disabilities	Students with Disabilities	
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Alabama High School Graduation Exam
Alaska <sup>a</sup>	No	–	None (will begin with the graduating class of 2002)
Arizona	Yes	? <sup>b</sup>	Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards
Arkansas	No	–	None
California	No	–	None (locally-determined competency tests may exist)
Colorado	No	–	None
Connecticut	No	–	None
Delaware <sup>c</sup>	No	–	None
Florida	Yes	Yes	High School Competency Test
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Georgia High School Graduation Test
Hawaii	Yes	Yes	Hawaii State Test of Essential Competencies
Idaho	No	–	None
Illinois	No	–	None
Indiana	Yes	Yes	Grade 10 ISTEP+ Test (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress)
Iowa	No	–	None
Kansas	No	–	None
Kentucky	No	–	None
Louisiana	Yes	Yes	Graduation Exit Examination
Maine	No	–	None
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Maryland Functional Testing Program Maryland Test of Citizenship Skills
Massachusetts	No	–	None (pending for Year 1998; will be given to students with disabilities for the graduating class of 2003)
Michigan <sup>d</sup>	No	–	None (an exam exists for the state endorsement purpose)
Minnesota	Yes	No	Basic Standards Tests
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	Functional Literacy Exam
Missouri	No	–	None
Montana	No	–	None
Nebraska	No	–	None
Nevada	Yes	Yes	High School Proficiency Exam
New Hampshire	No	–	None
New Jersey	Yes	No	High School Proficiency Test
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	New Mexico High School Competency Exam
New York	Yes	Yes	Regents Competency Tests Regents Examinations
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Competency Test Computer Skills Test
North Dakota	No	–	None
Ohio	Yes	No	Minimum Competency Test

**Table 8. High School Graduation Requirements: Graduation Exams (continued)**

State	Required to pass for a high school diploma?		Graduation Exam
	Students without Disabilities	Students with Disabilities	
Oklahoma	No	--	None
Oregon	No	--	None
Pennsylvania	No	--	None
Rhode Island	No	--	None
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Exit Examinations
South Dakota	No	--	None
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Competency Test Tennessee Proficiency Test
Texas <sup>e</sup>	Yes	Yes	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Utah	No	--	None
Vermont	No	--	None
Virginia	Yes	Yes	Literacy Passport Test
Washington	No	--	None
West Virginia	No	--	None
Wisconsin	No	--	None
Wyoming	No	--	None
District of Columbia	No	--	None (pending for Year 2001)
Total Number	20	16	

<sup>a</sup> In 1997, the Alaska Legislature enacted a law that requires all high school students to pass the High School Qualifying Examination in reading, writing, and mathematics before they can earn standard high school diplomas. The freshman class of Year 1998-99 will be first class required to pass the exam. Students will take the exam for the first time in the spring of the tenth grade.

<sup>b</sup> The transition specialist indicated that students with disabilities are not required to pass an exit exam to receive a high school diploma, whereas the assessment director indicated that the exam requirements for students with disabilities were to be determined.

<sup>c</sup> Delaware's response of "No" to the graduation exam requirement reflects the response of the assessment director. The transition specialist in the state indicated that there was a requirement for students to pass an exam. The difference in responses is most likely due to a change in law for the future (thus the transition specialist's Yes) that is not yet implemented (thus the assessment director's No).

<sup>d</sup> In Michigan, legislation has mandated the implementation of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) High School Tests (HSTs) in mathematics, science, reading and writing. During the spring of 1998, schools administered the exam. Students who meet local requirements for graduation will receive a high school diploma with or without the state endorsements: Level 1 (Exceeded Michigan Standards), Level 2 (Met Michigan Standards) or Level 3 (Basic Level).

<sup>e</sup> In Texas, students who are exempted from the exit exam must take alternative exams.



**Table 9. Can Students still Receive a Standard Diploma when Exempted from Graduation Exam?**

<b>State With Grad Exam</b>	<b>Students Without Disabilities</b>	<b>Students With Disabilities</b>
Alabama	No	No
Arizona	Still deciding policy	Still deciding policy
Florida	No	No
Georgia	No	No
Hawaii	No	No
Indiana	No	No
Louisiana	No	No
Maryland	No	No
Minnesota	No	Yes <sup>a</sup>
Mississippi	No	No
Nevada	No	No
New Jersey	No	Yes <sup>b</sup>
New Mexico	No	No
New York	No	No
North Carolina	No	No
Ohio	No	Yes <sup>c</sup>
South Carolina	No	No
Tennessee	No	No
Texas	No	No <sup>d</sup>
Virginia	No	No
Total Number (20)	0	3

<sup>a</sup> In Minnesota, students with disabilities who are exempted from the graduation examination can receive a standard diploma by completing IEP goals and objectives.

<sup>b</sup> In New Jersey, if students with disabilities are exempted as described in their IEPs, they can get a standard diploma without taking the graduation examination.

<sup>c</sup> In Ohio, students with disabilities can be exempted from all or part of the graduation examination as documented in their IEPs. They still can get a standard diploma by meeting core competencies and core courses required for a standard diploma.

<sup>d</sup> In Texas, if students with disabilities are exempted from the graduation examination, they must participate in an alternative assessment, as determined by the IEP team, for a standard diploma.

**Table 10. Implementation of Graduation Exams**

State	Grad Class <sup>a</sup>	Grade <sup>b</sup>	Content Areas				
			Eng/ Lang Arts	Math	Social Studies	Science	Other
Alabama	1985	11	✓	✓			
Arizona	2001	10	✓	✓			
Florida	1977	11		✓			✓ <sup>c</sup>
Georgia	1995	11	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hawaii	1983	10	✓	✓	✓		✓ <sup>d</sup>
Indiana	2000	10	✓	✓			
Louisiana	1991	10, 11 <sup>e</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Maryland	1979	7	✓	✓	✓		
Minnesota	2000	8, 10 <sup>f</sup>	✓	✓			
Mississippi	1989	11	✓	✓			
Nevada	1980	11	✓	✓			
New Jersey	1994	11	✓	✓			
New Mexico	1991	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	
New York	1979	9, 10, 11 <sup>g</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
North Carolina	1981	8	✓	✓			✓ <sup>h</sup>
Ohio	1994	8, 9 <sup>i</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
South Carolina	1990	10	✓	✓			
Tennessee	1983	9	✓	✓			
	1998 <sup>j</sup>						
Texas	1987	10	✓	✓			
Virginia	2004	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Total Number	20		19	20	8	6	3

<sup>a</sup> Graduating class for which the exam was or will be first implemented.

<sup>b</sup> Grade when students can first take the exam.

<sup>c</sup> Communications

<sup>d</sup> 16 Essential Competencies

<sup>e</sup> Grade 10 (Language Arts, Math, Written Composition); Grade 11 (Social Studies, Science).

<sup>f</sup> Grade 8 (Reading, Math); Grade 10 (Writing).

<sup>g</sup> In New York, students must pass Regents Competency Tests in 6 content areas to earn local diplomas. Students are required to pass Regents Examinations to receive Regents Diplomas with Honors. Students can take them in grade 9, 10, or 11.

<sup>h</sup> Computer Skills Test will be first implemented for the graduating class of 2001 in Grade 8.

<sup>i</sup> In Ohio, students are required to take the exam in Grade 9; however, districts can choose to administer the exam in Grade 8.

<sup>j</sup> Tennessee Proficiency Test was first administered for the graduating class of 1983. Competency Test in Language Arts and Math will be first administered for the graduating class of 1998.

assign passing scores to students with disabilities (see Table 11). Twelve states clearly indicated that all students with disabilities, regardless of the severity levels of disabilities, were required to pass the same graduation exam with the same passing score as students without disabilities. These 12 states were: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. In three states (Louisiana, Maryland, Tennessee), the use of the same graduation test and the same passing score depended on the severity level of the student’s disability. Louisiana and Tennessee gave the same test and

**Table 11. Who is Required to Pass the Same Exam with the Same Score as Those for Students without Disabilities to Earn a High School Diploma?**

State With Exit Exam	Severity Level of Disability		
	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Alabama	✓	✓	✓
Arizona		Still deciding policy	
Florida	✓	✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓	✓
Hawaii	✓	✓	✓
Indiana	✓	✓	✓
Louisiana	✓	–	–
Maryland	✓	✓	–
Minnesota <sup>a, c</sup>	–	–	–
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓
Nevada <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓	✓
New Jersey <sup>c</sup>	–	–	–
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓
New York	✓	✓	✓
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓
Ohio <sup>c</sup>	–	–	–
South Carolina	✓	✓	✓
Tennessee	✓	–	–
Texas <sup>d</sup>	–	–	–
Virginia	✓	✓	✓
Total Number (20)	15	13	12

<sup>a</sup> Regardless of severity level, all students with disabilities may take the same test with the same passing scores, take the same test with different passing scores, or take different tests with different passing scores.

<sup>b</sup> Students with disabilities must pass the same test with same passing scores to earn standard diplomas. Those pursuing adjusted diplomas may pass different tests with different scores.

<sup>c</sup> Students with disabilities can earn standard diplomas by passing an exit exam; however, they can be exempted from the exam and still can receive standard diplomas.

<sup>d</sup> When students with disabilities are exempted from the graduation exam, they should participate in an alternative assessment, as determined by the IEP team.

applied the same passing score only to students with mild disabilities. In Maryland, students with mild or moderate disabilities were required to pass the same exit exam with the same score as those for students without disabilities whereas students with severe disabilities were allowed to take different tests and pass the tests with different scores.

Of the 20 states that had a graduation exam, 16 indicated that they kept records of the participation of students with disabilities and 14 reported that they kept records of the performance of students with disabilities on the exam (see Table 12). Eleven states disaggregated participation data by disability category, and ten disaggregated performance data by disability category at the time we conducted the survey. The specific state records of exam participation and performance are identified in Appendix D.

### Status of Graduation Policies

In this section, we discuss data from the current survey and compare them to data collected by Thurlow, Ysseldyke, and Anderson in 1995. Policy changes that have occurred since 1995 and indications of the stability of current policies are also presented.

**Table 12. State Records of Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities on the Graduation Exam**

State	Record of Participation		Record of Performance	
	Exists?	Disaggregated <sup>a</sup>	Exists?	Disaggregated?
Alabama	Yes	No	Yes	No
Arizona	NR <sup>b</sup>	NR	NR	NR
Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hawaii	No	--	Yes	NR
Indiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	No	Yes	No
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi	Yes	No	No	--
Nevada	No	--	No	--
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	No	--	No	--
New York	Yes	No	Yes	No
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ohio	Yes	Yes	NR	NR
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tennessee	Yes	NR	NR	NR
Texas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Total Number (20)	16	11	14	10

<sup>a</sup> Are the data disaggregated by disability category?

<sup>b</sup> NR stands for no response.

Comparison of data from the current survey and those collected in 1995 indicated that the policies about exit options available to students with disabilities are continually changing. Approximately one-third of the states had either changed the number of options available to students with disabilities to exit school, with more options now available, or had changed the requirements to receive a standard diploma. In 1995, for example, the standard diploma was the single exit option for students with disabilities in 19 states. Eleven of these states indicated in the current study that they had changed their policies to include other exit options.

The provision of standard diplomas to students with disabilities based on completion of IEP goals and objectives also has changed somewhat since 1995. Half of the eight states that currently award standard diplomas based solely on completion of IEP goals and objectives had the same policy in 1995. The majority of the remaining states that awarded standard diplomas in 1998 based only on completion of IEP goals had changed their policies from requiring course credits (Missouri, Oklahoma) or from having both credit and exam requirements (Tennessee) for students with disabilities in 1995. Of the nine states that allowed students with disabilities to receive standard diplomas based only on completion of IEPs in 1995, three no longer applied this policy to students with disabilities in 1998. These states now require students with disabilities to complete modified credit requirements. One other state now has LEAs or IEP committees decide standard diploma requirements for students with disabilities.

Relatively little change has occurred in terms of the source of graduation policies. Of the six states that left the final decision of graduation credit requirements to LEAs in 1995, five still did so in 1998 (through addition or distribution decisions or determination of credits required for specific courses). Wyoming now has state-level credit requirements. Only Pennsylvania has changed the locus for decision-making to local districts.

Similarly, changes in the number of states with credit requirements also have been minimal. In 1995, 44 states had a total number of credits that students had to earn, and in 1998, 41 states specified a total number of credits. Changes are more evident in the number of credits required. Of the 40 states for which there are both 1995 and 1998 data on total credit requirements, approximately one fourth have increased the number of credits required for receipt of a standard diploma. Of these states, six increased credits in core academics such as math and science. Other states broadened the content of courses through the establishment of credit requirements in other courses such as physical education or health. One other state has slightly decreased the total number of credits required. The other three states appear to have changed the unit of the credit measurement.

The number of states that have an exit exam linked to graduation requirements has increased from 17 to 20. One state (Michigan) still has an exit exam but it is no longer linked to receipt of

a local standard diploma. Instead, it is used for receipt of state endorsements on the local diplomas. Four states (Arizona, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina) have added exit exams since 1995.

To examine the extent to which policies may continue to change, state assessment directors were asked about the status of general graduation policies in 1998, and transition specialists were asked about the status of graduation policies specifically for students with disabilities in 1998. Their responses are organized according to whether the status was the same for students with and without disabilities, or applied only to policies for one group. If the state assessment director and the transition specialist indicated the same response, the status was recorded as applying to both students with and without disabilities. If only the state assessment director indicated a specific status, it was recorded as applying to students without disabilities. If only the transition specialist indicated a specific status, it was recorded as applying to students with disabilities.

As indicated in Table 13, it appears that policies about exit options will continue to change, especially for students with disabilities. In 18 states, options for students without disabilities to exit school were either under revision or consideration of revision. This compares to 23 states that indicated that options for students with disabilities to exit school were either under revision or under consideration of revision. In contrast, 31 states had no plans to revise the types of exit options available to students without disabilities, and 24 had no plans to revise the types of exit options available to students with disabilities.

The relationship between the existence of a statewide exam, the types of exit options available, and the status of exit option policies is displayed in Table 14. These data indicate that of the 20 states that had some form of a statewide graduation exam, 16 were either revising or considering revision of the types of exit documents available to students with disabilities or students without disabilities, or both groups. Of the 10 states that offered standard diplomas (with or without honors diplomas) as the only option available to students with disabilities, half were either revising or considering revisions on the types of exit options available (California, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington).

Information about the status of high school graduation requirements is summarized in Table 15. Sixteen states reported that they were either revising or considering revisions on their graduation requirements for students without disabilities and 14 indicated revision plans for students with disabilities. In nine states (Alabama, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia, Wyoming), new graduation requirements had been developed for students without disabilities. Four states (Alaska, Arizona, Indiana, Minnesota) had developed new graduation requirements for students with disabilities. Thirteen states will implement new graduation requirements developed for students with disabilities or students without disabilities

**Table 13. Status of Exit Options Available in Each State**

<b>Status of Exit Options</b>	<b>Students With and Without Disabilities</b>	<b>Students Without Disabilities</b>	<b>Students With Disabilities</b>
No plans for revision	Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin	Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming	Alabama, Arizona, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina
	16	15	8
Currently under consideration of revision	California, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, District of Columbia	Arizona, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina	Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia
	6	5	13
Currently under revision	Massachusetts, New York	Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, South Carolina, Vermont	Louisiana, Oregon
	2	5	2
No response		Idaho, New Mexico	Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Wyoming
		2	4

sometime between 1998 and 2002. Twenty-five states indicated no plans to revise graduation requirements for students without disabilities. This compares to 21 states that indicated no plans to revise their graduation requirements for students with disabilities.

Table 16 displays the status of policies on graduation exams. The majority of the 20 states that had some form of a graduation exam (70%) were either revising or considering revisions on their policies. Only five states indicated no plans to revise their graduation exam policies. Ten additional states (Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wisconsin, District of Columbia) were developing or considering the development of graduation exams.

## **Discussion**

Given the importance of graduating from high school, we did not expect to find the complexity in graduation requirement policies that we found. Not quite as unexpected was our finding that

**Table 14. Graduation Exam, Exit Options, and Status of Exit Options for Students with and without Disabilities**

State	Graduation Exam	Exit Options					Status of Exit Options	
		Standard Diploma	Certificate of Attendance	IEP Diploma	Honors Diploma	Other Options <sup>a</sup>	Students Without Disabilities	Students With Disabilities
Alabama	✓	✓	✓+	✓	✓	✓	R	NR
Alaska	-	✓	✓	✓+	-	-	NR	NR
Arizona	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	CR	NR
Arkansas	-	✓	✓+	✓+	-	-	NR	CR
California	-	✓	-	-	✓-	-	CR	CR
Colorado	-	✓	-	✓+	-	✓+	NR	NR
Connecticut	-	✓	✓+	✓+	-	✓-	NR	NR
Delaware	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	R	CR
Florida	✓	✓	✓-	✓	✓-	-	NR	CR
Georgia	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	CR	CR
Hawaii	✓	✓	✓-	✓+	✓-	-	CR	NR
Idaho	-	✓	-	-	-	-	NA	CR
Illinois	-	✓	✓+	-	-	-	NR	NR
Indiana	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓+	NR	CR
Iowa	-	✓	-	✓	-	-	NR	NA
Kansas	-	✓	-	-	-	✓-	NR	NR
Kentucky	-	✓	-	✓+	✓-	-	R	NR
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	NR	R
Maine	-	✓	-	✓+	-	-	R	NR
Maryland	✓	✓	✓	✓+	-	✓+	CR	NR
Massachusetts	-	✓-	-	-	-	✓-	R	R
Michigan	-	✓	✓	✓+	✓-	-	NR	CR
Minnesota	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	NR	NR
Mississippi	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	NR	NR
Missouri	-	✓	✓	-	✓-	-	NR	NR
Montana	-	✓	-	✓+	-	-	NR	NR
Nebraska	-	✓	✓+	-	-	✓-	NR	CR
Nevada	✓	✓	✓+	✓	-	✓-	NR	CR
New Hampshire	-	✓	✓	✓+	-	-	NR	NR
New Jersey	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	CR	CR
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓+	✓+	-	✓+	NA	CR
New York	✓	✓	✓+	✓	✓	✓-	R	R
North Carolina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓-	-	CR	NR
North Dakota	-	✓	✓+	✓+	-	-	NR	NR
Ohio	✓	✓	-	-	✓-	✓-	NR	NR
Oklahoma	-	✓	-	-	-	-	NR	NA
Oregon	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	NR	R
Pennsylvania	-	✓	-	-	-	✓+	CR	NR
Rhode Island	-	✓	-	-	-	-	NR	NR
South Carolina	✓	✓	✓+	-	-	-	R	NR
South Dakota	-	✓	-	-	-	-	NR	NR
Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓-	-	NR	NR
Texas	✓	✓	✓+	-	-	-	NR	NR
Utah	-	✓	✓+	-	-	-	NR	NR
Vermont	-	✓	✓+	-	-	-	R	CR
Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓+	✓-	✓	NR	CR
Washington	-	✓	-	-	-	-	CR	CR
West Virginia	-	✓	-	✓	-	-	NR	CR
Wisconsin	-	✓	✓+	-	-	-	NR	NR
Wyoming	-	✓	✓+	-	-	-	NR	NA
District of Columbia	-	✓	✓+	✓+	-	-	CR	CR
Total Number	20	51	31	28	12	13		

Note. Exit options with minus marks (✓-) were identified only by assessment directors. Exit options with plus mark (✓+) were identified only by transition specialists. Exit options without + or - marks (✓) were identified by both assessment directors and transition specialists.

R = Revising.

NR = No plan for revision.

CR = Considering revision.

- = Not available

<sup>a</sup> Other exit options include an occupational diploma (Alabama), a work/study diploma (Colorado), a certificate of achievement for special education students for whom a diploma track is not appropriate (Indiana), a GED diploma (Maryland, Pennsylvania), a career readiness diploma (New Mexico), and a special diploma (Virginia).



**Table 15. Status of High School Graduation Requirements in Each State**

<b>Status of Graduation Requirements</b>	<b>Students With and Without Disabilities</b>	<b>Students Without Disabilities</b>	<b>Students With Disabilities</b>
No plans for revision	Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia	Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma,	Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin,
	12	13	9
Currently under consideration of revision	Pennsylvania, Washington	California, Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, District of Columbia	Arkansas, Mississippi, New Mexico, Ohio, Vermont
	2	9	5
Currently under revision	-	Arkansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Vermont	Alabama, Idaho, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York
	-	5	7
None currently exist	-	-	California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Montana, Oklahoma, Oregon
	-	-	7
None currently exist, but under consideration of revision	-	-	Colorado, Wyoming
	-	-	2
New requirements have been developed (year of effect)	-	Alabama (1999), Delaware (1999), Maryland (2001), Massachusetts (2001), New York (2002), Ohio (2002), South Carolina (2001), Virginia (1998) Wyoming (2001)	Alaska (2002), Arizona (2000), Indiana (2000), Minnesota (1998)
	-	9	4
No response	-	New Mexico	Iowa, New Hampshire, District of Columbia
	-	1	3

**Table 16. Status of Graduation Exam Available in Each State**

<b>Status of Graduation Exam</b>	<b>States With Graduation Exam</b>	<b>States Without Graduation Exam</b>
No plans for revision	Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, South Carolina, Virginia 5	-
Currently under consideration of revision	Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas 5	-
Currently under revision	Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, 9	-
None currently exist	-	Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont West, Virginia, Wyoming 20
No exam currently exist, but is under development or under consideration of development	-	Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wisconsin, District of Columbia 10
No response	New Mexico 1	California 1

policies are not the same across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Unfortunately, the complexity in state policies is multiplied many times over when considering what students with disabilities must do to earn an exit document of one kind or another.

The complexity of the system exists in more than just the requirements that students must meet to earn a standard diploma. It begins with the array of exit options that students have available to them (e.g., certificates of completion, IEP diplomas, honors diplomas), and the specific requirements that must be met to earn each of those types of documents. Further, the source of graduation requirements varies, with some states having everything set at the state level, others having everything set at the local level, and many states with a variety of combinations in between. For students with disabilities, the complexities are increased by the existence of exit options not available to students without disabilities (such as the IEP diploma), and by the possibility of modifications in requirements or even exemption from requirements that students without disabilities must meet to receive the same exit document.

## General Conclusions

Despite the complexities, however, it is possible to reach some general conclusions about graduation requirements for students with and without disabilities. These conclusions have important implications for students' educational outcomes, particularly for students with disabilities.

**A wide array of exit options are available to students in most states.** Just nine states indicated that the standard diploma was the single exit option available to students. One additional state had an honors diploma and the standard diploma as the only exit options. Thus, approximately 80% of the states have alternative exit options for students. Generally, these exit options involve some type of certification that the student has been in school, reflecting attendance rather than attainment of specific skills or completion of certain courses. The number of states that have alternative exit options for students has grown.

**States have raised and are continuing to raise their requirements for graduation.** Since 1995, and even before that when Bodner et al. (1987) provided summary information on graduation requirements, there has been an increase in the number of states raising their requirements, either by adding to the number of credits required or by administering a graduation exam that students must pass. And, at the time of the current survey, many states indicated that they were planning to make changes that would result in increased graduation requirements. Nearly 20% of the states were either developing or considering the development of graduation exams as an added requirement for a standard high school diploma. Because of the possible consequences of such developments, it will be important to follow the considerations of these states as they decide how to include students with disabilities and the exit options that they make available to all students.

**States that allow flexibility for students with disabilities in meeting graduation requirements tend to provide that flexibility in multiple ways.** Among the ways in which states are building greater flexibility in graduation requirements for students with disabilities are coursework modifications, IEP completion, local-level decisions about applicability of requirements to individual students, and others. Some states embrace providing a range of approaches to flexibility, while others do not.

**Modified coursework to meet course credit requirements is the most common type of change provided to students with disabilities.** Of the states that had state-level course credit requirements for earning a standard diploma, not quite half allowed students to meet those requirements through modified coursework. Based on materials sent by some of these states, the substitute coursework generally was in the same content areas as that required of other students, but might be a more practical application of the content (e.g., consumer mathematics

rather than advanced mathematics; reading for independent living and work-related literacy rather than world literature). The extent to which these alternative courses really were performance-based approaches to the same general content area, or instead were lower-level or “watered-down” content, was impossible for us to determine.

**IEP completion is not a universally accepted way for students with disabilities to meet graduation requirements.** Just over 10% of the states with course credit requirements allowed students to receive a standard diploma by completing their IEPs. Yet, several additional states indicated that an IEP team or an LEA could decide to change state-determined graduation requirements. It is unclear what is occurring when an IEP team decides that state- or district-determined criteria do not apply (presumably for individual students) or an LEA decides that its students with disabilities do not have to meet state requirements. The fact that decisions can be made to remove graduation requirements for students with disabilities may suggest that these students are being held to different standards than other students.

**States with graduation exams generally had more exit options available to students, but less flexibility in how standard diploma requirements could be met.** The 20 states with graduation exams are different in several ways from states without graduation exams. First, a greater number of exit documents seem to be available in those states with graduation exams (on average 3.2 exit options available) than in those states without graduation exams (on the average 2.2 exit options available). This is particularly evident in those states that have been implementing exams for a long time (at least five years). States with graduation exams also differed in the extent to which they allowed changes to their graduation requirements for students with disabilities. About one-third of the states with graduation exams allowed no changes in either credit or exam performance requirements, while just over 10% of the states without graduation exams allowed no changes. It is important to note that, whether the states had graduation exams or not, those states that did not allow changes in requirements had at least two exit options available to students; most had three or four options.

**The current status of states in documenting the participation and performance of students with disabilities on exit exams suggests that states are going to have a difficult time meeting some of the requirements of the 1997 amendments to IDEA.** About 80% of the states with graduation exams indicated that they had records of the participation of students with disabilities in those exams, and more than half of these also disaggregated their data by disability category (*not* a federal requirement). Less than 75% of the states with graduation exams had records of the performance of students with disabilities; approximately 70% of these states had disaggregated performance data by category of disability (again, not a federal requirement). Even though these numbers reflect a majority of the states with graduation exams, the survey was conducted just before the time when states had to be able to report participation and performance data for the first time. We expected that all states would have responded positively

to questions about state records of participation and performance of students with disabilities. The fact that they did not suggests that many states will struggle to be in compliance with the federal reporting requirements entailed in IDEA 97.

**The different responses of assessment directors and transition specialists reflect more than just differences in policies for students with disabilities and other students.** We believe that the differences reflect, in part, the disconnect that has been noted in the past between the two programs within state education departments (McGrew, Thurlow, & Spiegel, 1993; Thurlow, Langefeld, Nelson, Shin, & Coleman, 1998). With the 1997 IDEA requirement that states include students with disabilities in state assessments, that they report on the participation and performance of these students in the same way and with the same frequency as they do for other students, and that they develop an alternate assessment for students unable to participate in regular state assessments, there is clearly a need for the two programs to collaborate. The extent to which this happens certainly will have a dramatic effect on how students are integrated into states' educational accountability systems, and perhaps even on the extent to which the total educational systems assumes responsibility for the education of these students. Certainly it will reduce the amount of "parallel play" by general education and special education educators as they strive to meet the letter and intent of the law.

### Further Considerations

The interest in high stakes testing and graduation requirements continues as more and more states seem to be increasing their graduation requirements and as more states turn to graduation exams as a way to determine whether students should receive a standard diploma. Various organizations are now producing reports or maintaining Web sites that document the policies of the states (e.g., Achieve, 1998; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1998; Education Commission of the States, 1997; National Center on Educational Outcomes, 1997; Roeber, Bond, & Connealy, 1998). The National Research Council (1998) produced a report entitled *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*, which identified the issues and research evidence on these assessments. This document is unique in that it addresses the accurate assessment of students with disabilities and students who are English-language learners. It recognizes that the objectives of large-scale assessments and the need to find ways to adjust for the effects of disability are often in conflict, and suggests that these tensions should be considered as assessments are developed.

As we look at graduation requirements that currently exist, it is equally important to consider the consequences of the tremendous reforms that are now taking place across the nation. Further policy development and refinement should be based on the intended and unintended consequences of current policies. Multiple exit options, for example, may reflect a belief that the school is no

longer responsible for the education of those students who receive some kind of alternative exit option. Or, multiple exit options may reflect the belief that some students with disabilities have a different set of knowledge and skills, and need an exit option that reflects that difference. Both of these assumptions will affect how and where students with disabilities are educated. What is the endpoint of education: achievement of certain knowledge and skills, or receipt of an exit document (even if achieved through modified standards)? The reasons for which students are exempted from graduation exams should also provide direction for future policy development and refinement. To what extent are decisions to exempt students from graduation exam requirements a function of low expectations for those students? Or, do they reflect a failure to provide the types of accommodations that students need to appropriately access the assessments?

Although it is easy to leap to the conclusion that modifications in requirements for students with disabilities reflect lower-level standards, this may not be the case. We do not have good data to verify or deny that modified coursework or alternative forms of assessment reflect the same high levels of knowledge and skills as those in the standard courses and exams. This kind of information is needed for states and future employers to really understand the achievements of those individuals who do not obtain standard diplomas. This need applies most notably to students with disabilities since they are the ones for whom these modifications are most often made.

On the other hand, it is also important to ask about the extent to which the failure to provide flexibility in graduation requirements prevents students who do have the skills that they need to succeed in post-secondary work or educational settings from progressing into those settings. The stories of “gifted” students with learning disabilities who are unable to complete coursework or pass exams because of their processing difficulties are familiar to all special educators. Examples are emerging in post-school settings as well. There are adults with disabilities who are successfully performing in their jobs, but are receiving lower pay than their co-workers because they lack the proper credentials. They are individuals who could not get a community college certificate in a vocation (e.g., diesel mechanics) because they did not have a high school diploma. Concerns about these students have spurred approaches like that taken by Texas, which allows both modified coursework and an alternative exam for its students with disabilities.

The confluence of Goals 2000, the Improving America’s Schools Act, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, topped by the reauthorization of IDEA, have generated much interest in developing an integrated educational system that accounts for all of its students. Yet, the fact that this means that students with disabilities may be merged into a system that has a heavy focus on academics, often to the exclusion of more applied and vocational kinds of skills, threatens what has been working for students with disabilities. There are clearly advantages to continuing to emphasize vocational education, career education, and other experiences related to the development of social skills and independent living. The ideal, of course, is the integration

of academic and vocational education (Ascher & Flaxman, 1993; Bottoms, Presson, & Johnson, 1992; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). It will be important to monitor the extent to which students continue to receive this type of education, and when and where they receive it. We must also continue to work on educational approaches that foster the integration of academic and functional skills and knowledge.

Again, we come back to the ability of the educational system to meet the needs of all students. Changes in graduation requirements are pushing the system to figure out a better way to do that. At this time, however, not enough is known about the consequences of these changes. Unfortunately, the variability that exists within the states limits the feasibility of a comprehensive, national study of the facts of different exit options and policies. Yet, there are some clear recommendations that policymakers should consider as they set policies for graduation requirements.

- **Specify the assumptions underlying graduation policies.** Be specific as to why requirements might differ for subgroups of students (e.g., recognizing that disabilities may interfere with the expression of knowledge and skills through typical assessments).
- **Ensure that graduation requirements reflect the variety of knowledge and skills that students are learning in school and will need after high school.** Use indicators of the knowledge and skills necessary for successful work, learning, and living after high school.
- **Consider the impact that leaving high school without a regular diploma will have on the opportunities available to students after high school.** Create policies that will not exclude students whose learning characteristics require more time to meet graduation requirements, and policies that will provide them ample time to gain additional knowledge and skills.
- **Allow plenty of time for changes in requirements to be phased into place.** Prior court cases have suggested that four years are needed as a phase-in period for graduation requirements (e.g., students must know about a graduation exam four years before it will determine whether they graduate). Yet, for students with disabilities, who have experienced exclusion from the general education curriculum and low expectations, four years may not be enough. Instead, it may be reasonable to hold these students to a set of graduation requirements, only if the requirements have been in place since the students started school.
- **Make high school graduation decisions on the basis of multiple, relevant sources of information about students' knowledge and skills.** There is considerable evidence

that important decisions about individuals should not be based on a single source of information. (National Research Council, 1998).

These recommendations, and others that might be generated for a given state context, can form the foundation of policies that are more appropriate for students with disabilities and for other at-risk students.



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## **Appendix A**

### High School Graduation Requirements Survey Questions

# The High School Graduation Requirements Survey Questions

*Please read each question carefully and circle the number next to the response that applies to your state.*

## SECTION I: SOURCES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

1. Does your state establish graduation requirements that all local education agencies (LEAs) must follow?

1 = Yes

2 = No

2. How are high school graduation requirements established in your state? (*Circle all that apply*)

1 = State provides minimum requirements and LEAs may add to them.

2 = State requirements must be followed and LEAs cannot add to them.

3 = State provides guidelines and LEAs may set their own requirements.

4 = No state requirements exist--LEAs set their own requirements.

3. Does your state have endorsed or honors diplomas? (Endorsed diplomas are given to students who not only have passed an exit exam but also have scored at a higher level than the minimum required for regular diplomas. Honors diplomas are given to students who have passed a more rigorous test.)

1 = Yes (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

2 = No

## SECTION II: EXAMINATIONS REQUIRED TO RECEIVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

4. Does your state require youth to pass an exam in order to receive a high school diploma?

1 = Yes (If *Yes*, continue)

2 = No (If *No*, go to **Question 13**)

5. For which graduating class was this exam first implemented? (e.g., Graduating Class of 1998)

6. What types of diplomas require passing scores on the exam? (*Circle all that apply*)

1 = Standard diploma

2 = Certificate of attendance or completion

3 = Others (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

7. What content areas are covered on the exam required to receive a high school diploma? (*Circle all that apply*)

1 = English/Language Arts

2 = Math

3 = Social Studies

4 = Science

5 = Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

8. How are scores for passing the exam determined?

1 = By the state.

2 = By the state, but can be modified by each LEA.

3 = By each LEA independently.

9. In your state, who can be exempted from the exam? (*Circle all that apply*)

1 = No one.

2 = Some youth with disabilities (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

3 = Some youth with limited English proficiency (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

4 = Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

10. When can students first take the exam?

Grade

11. What happens when students fail the exam? (*Circle all that apply*)

1 = Youth can retake the same form of the exam.

How many times can youth take the exam? \_\_\_\_\_

2 = Youth can take an alternative form of the exam.

3 = Youth can take a different exam.

4 = Youth can receive remedial work.

5 = Youth can petition for exemption, but still receive a diploma.

6 = Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

12. *Presently*, what concerns or issues are being expressed about the graduation exam in your state?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **SECTION III: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT POLICY CHANGES**

13. What is the status of types of high school diplomas available?

1 = No plans for revision.

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

3 = Currently under revision.

14. In your state, what is the status of high school graduation requirements?

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

3 = Currently under revision.

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No high school graduation requirements currently exist, but their development is under consideration.

6 = New requirements have been developed and will be in effect in year \_\_\_\_\_.

15. In your state, what is the status of high school content standards (i.e., what youth should know and be able to do within each subject)? (Please circle all the responses that apply.)

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

3 = Currently under revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No content standards currently exist, but their development is under consideration.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

16. In your state, what is the status of high school performance criteria/standards (i.e., levels of competence youth must demonstrate in areas described by content standards)? (Please circle all the responses that apply.)

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

3 = Currently under revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No performance criteria/standards currently exist, but their development is under consideration.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_)

17. In your state, what is the status of the exam required to receive a high school diploma?

1 = Currently exists, and no plans for revision.

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

3 = Currently under revision.

4 = None currently exists.

5 = No exam currently exists, but its development is under consideration.

## **Appendix B**

### High School Graduation Requirements and Students with Disabilities Survey Questions



# The High School Graduation Requirements and Students with Disabilities Survey Questions

*Please read each question carefully and circle the number next to the response that applies to your state.*

## SECTION I: SOURCES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

1. How are high school graduation requirements for youth with disabilities established in your state?  
(Circle only one)

- 1 = State provides minimum requirements and local education agencies (LEAs) may add to them.
- 2 = State requirements must be followed and LEAs cannot add to them.
- 3 = State provides guidelines and LEAs may set their own requirements.
- 4 = No state requirements exist -- LEAs set their own requirements.

2. In your state, what types of high school diplomas are available to youth with disabilities?  
(Circle all that apply)

- 1 = Standard (Regular) diploma.
- 2 = IEP diploma.
- 3 = Certificate of attendance.
- 4 = Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

3. What changes are allowed for youth with disabilities to receive a standard diploma? (Circle all that apply)

- 1 = No changes allowed.
- 2 = Reduce number of credits.
- 3 = Credits given for alternate courses.
- 4 = Lower performance criteria.
- 5 = Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are there prerequisites that youth with disabilities must have before taking courses required to receive a standard diploma or to meet high school graduation requirements?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No

## SECTION II: EXAMINATIONS REQUIRED TO RECEIVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

5. Does your state require youth with disabilities to pass an exam in order to receive a high school diploma?

- 1 = Yes (If *Yes*, continue)
- 2 = No (If *No*, go to **Question 9**)

6. When youth with disabilities participate in the exam required to receive a high school diploma, how are the passing scores applied to the exam? (*Check all that apply.*)

	Mild Disabilities	Moderate Disabilities	Severe Disabilities
1 = Use the same test and the same passing scores as those for regular education students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 = Use the same test but different passing scores as those for regular education students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 = Use different test and different passing scores.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Does your state keep records of the numbers of youth with disabilities who participate in the exam required to receive a high school diploma?

- 1 = Yes (If *Yes*, continue)
- 2 = No (If *No*, go to **Question 8**)

7.1 If *Yes*, where are these numbers reported? (*List specific documents.*)

---



---

7.2 Is this information available by disability category?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No

8. Does your state keep records of the performance of youth with disabilities on the exam required to receive a high school diploma?

- 1 = Yes (If *Yes*, continue)
- 2 = No (If *No*, go to **Question 9**)

8.1 If Yes, where is the performance of youth with disabilities reported?  
(List specific documents)

---

---

8.2 Is this information available by disability category?

1 = Yes

2 = No

### SECTION III: TRANSITION SERVICES

9. Can youth with disabilities who are under the age of 22 and have met graduation requirements continue to receive special education services?

1 = No, youth with disabilities do not continue to receive special education services after meeting graduation requirements.

2 = Yes, state policies specify that youth with disabilities can continue to receive special education services.

3 = Yes, but there is no specific state policy; LEAs establish their own policies.

10. Is continuation of special education services dependent on the type of diploma received?

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Not applicable

If Yes, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Where are those special education services usually provided?

1 = At the same location where youth with disabilities received services the previous year.

2 = At the school within the district other than the school where youth with disabilities received service the previous year.

3 = At an off-campus location such as a community college or office building.

4 = Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

12. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of the LEAs in your state are providing special education services to youth with disabilities beyond completion of graduation requirements?

1 = less than 10 %

2 = 10 - 24 %

3 = 25 - 49 %

4 = 50 - 74 %

5 = 75 - 90 %

6 = more than 90 %

13. To the best of your knowledge, for those LEAs that continue to provide special education services, what percentage of youth with disabilities continue to receive services after meeting graduation requirements?

1 = less than 10 %

2 = 10 - 24 %

3 = 25 - 49 %

4 = 50 - 74 %

5 = 75 - 90 %

6 = more than 90 %

## **SECTION IV: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT POLICY CHANGES**

14. What is the status of types of high school diploma available to youth with disabilities?

1 = No plans for revision.

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

3 = Currently under revision.

15. In your state, what is the status of high school graduation requirements for youth with disabilities?

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

3 = Currently under revision.

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No high school graduation requirements currently exist, but their development is under consideration.

6 = New requirements have been developed and will be in effect in year \_\_\_\_\_.

16. In your state, do the same content standards (i.e., what youth should know and be able to do within specified subject areas) apply to both youth *without* disabilities and youth *with* disabilities?

1 = Yes

2 = No

17. In your state, what is the status of high school content standards for youth with disabilities?  
(Please circle all the responses that apply.)

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

3 = Currently under revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No content standards exist, but their development is under consideration.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

18. In your state, do the same performance criteria/standards (i.e., levels of competence youth must demonstrate in areas described by content standards) apply to both youth *without* disabilities and youth *with* disabilities?

1 = Yes

2 = No

19. In your state, what is the status of high school performance criteria/standards for youth with disabilities?

1 = Currently exist, and no plans for revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

2 = Currently under consideration of revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

3 = Currently under revision.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

4 = None currently exist.

5 = No performance criteria/standards currently exist, but their development is under consideration.

(Please specify content areas: \_\_\_\_\_ )

20. In your state, what is the status of the exam required to receive a high school diploma for youth with disabilities?

- 1 = Currently exists, and no plans for revision.
- 2 = Currently under consideration of revision.
- 3 = Currently under revision.
- 4 = None currently exist.
- 5 = No exam currently exists, but its development is under consideration.

## **Appendix C**

### Assessment Directors' and Transition Specialists' Agreements and Disagreements About Exit Options

## Assessment Directors and Transition Specialists Agreements and Disagreements About Exit Options

Exit Options	States in which both assessment directors and transition specialists listed the option	States with option listed only by assessment directors	States with option listed only by transition specialists
Standard diploma	Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, District of Columbia	Massachusetts	
IEP diploma	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia		Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Virginia, District of Columbia
Certificate of attendance	Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia	Florida, Hawaii	Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin, Wyoming, District of Columbia
Honors diploma	Alabama, Indiana, New York	California, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia	
Other options	Alabama, Virginia	Connecticut, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Ohio	Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, New Mexico, Pennsylvania



## **Appendix D**

### State Records of Participation and Performance of Youth with Disabilities on the Graduation Exam

## State Records of Participation and Performance of Youth with Disabilities on the Graduation Exam

State	Record of Participation	Record of Performance
Alabama	High School Basic Skills Exam For Alabama-State Report - Fall 97	High School Basic Skills Exam For Alabama-State Report - Fall 97
Arizona	No response	No response
Florida	State Reports	State Reports
Georgia	State Summary, Local System Summary	Exists, but the name of the record not specified
Hawaii	None exist.	Exists, but the name of the record not specified.
Indiana	Department of Education School Assessment Data	Department of Education/Division of Statement Assessment
Louisiana	State Special Education Database General Education Database	Special Education Database
Maryland	Exists, but the name of the record not specified.	Exists, but the name of the record not specified.
Minnesota	Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS)	Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS)
Mississippi	Testing	None exist.
North Carolina	State Testing Results	State Testing Results
New Jersey	Cycle II Report	Cycle II Report
New Mexico	None exist.	None exist.
New York	Performance Report of Educational and Vocational Services and Results for Individuals with Disabilities	Performance Report of Educational and Vocational Services and Results for Individuals with Disabilities
Nevada	None exist.	None exist.
Ohio	State Aggregate Management Information System	No response
South Carolina	State Department of Education Report	State Department of Education Report
Tennessee	Exists, but not the name of the record specified.	No response
Texas	Public Education Information Management (PEIM) System	PEIMS, Performance Reports for Participants in Special Education
Virginia	Report of the Virginia Literacy Testing Program	Report of the Virginia Literacy Testing Program



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