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NEWS

NEW STUDY SHOWS THAT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION SHOULD DEPEND ON MORE THAN A TEST

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STANFORD, CA — In 2003, more than half of public school students in the U.S. were required to take an exit exam in order to graduate from high school. In some states this test will determine whether they graduate, regardless of what courses they have taken, what grades they have earned, and what abilities they have demonstrated in other ways. With additional states planning on phasing in new exit exams over the next several years, an increasing number of students will be expected to take such tests. Despite the growing popularity of these high-stakes tests, there has been little focus on their impact and efficacy.

A new study released today by Stanford University researchers sheds light on these policies, examining the impacts of state testing practices and the effectiveness of various approaches. The study, *Multiple Measures Approaches to Graduation*, is authored by researchers from the university's School Redesign Network. The report documents research findings on states that have required exit examinations as the primary basis for graduation from high school. In these states, research has documented:

- Reduced graduation rates, especially for African American and Latino students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.
- Incentives for schools to push out students who do poorly, when school ratings are contingent on the average pass rates of students.
- Narrowing of the curriculum and neglect of higher order performance skills where limited test measures are used.

The report also examines a range of approaches to high school graduation that include tests as one element in a broader array of indicators about student proficiency. These “multiple measures” approaches to graduation, used in at least 27 states, differ from single-test approaches in that they consider a variety of student work, which may include student academic records, research papers, portfolios, essays, capstone projects and oral exams. The report provides an in-depth examination of the assessment systems in the 27 states that use multiple measures approaches. It also discusses testing for English language learners and students with disabilities, and makes recommendations based on the body of evidence about test uses and effects.

"High school graduation policies have important consequences for teaching, learning, and student achievement," says Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford

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University and lead author of the report. “It is important both to balance tests with other sources of evidence and to encourage students to do real-world tasks that go beyond what can be measured with multiple-choice questions.

"Evidence from the last decade suggests that states that have used multiple measures approaches to graduation have tended to maintain high student test scores and high graduation rates,” adds SRN co-director, Ray Pecheone, who directed assessment policy in Connecticut during the 1990s. “Multiple measures systems that evaluate the full range of standards in a more balanced way produce student who are better prepared for today's workforce and for higher education."

Multiple measures assessments have proven to be more effective for a number of reasons. They provide a comprehensive assessment of students' abilities by examining a broad range of students skills, including higher-order performance skills such as problem solving, that multiple-choice tests can't measure. Systems that include local performance assessments also provide more comprehensive and timely feedback on student achievement — teachers can use the results of ongoing diagnostic assessments throughout the academic year to inform their planning. Finally, multiple measures assessments provide a balanced means for holding students and schools accountable, one which stimulates ongoing improvements.

The report highlights four components of a balanced assessment system that appear particularly productive for leveraging both high-quality assessment and high-quality instruction:

- Employing a range of assessments of student performance
- Providing assessment options for students with special needs
- Developing local assessments
- Implementing a process for review and approval of local assessment systems

The report concludes that using a multiple measures approach to graduation, in contrast to using a single test, can provide broader means for students to demonstrate their learning, better strategies for schools to evaluate the full range of standards in valid and appropriate ways, and rich individualized information about student learning, which is essential to school improvement and directly beneficial to classroom teachers.

Multiple Measures Approaches to Graduation is authored by Stanford University Professor of Education Linda Darling-Hammond, SRN Associate Director of Assessment & Accountability Elle Rustique-Forrester, SRN Co-executive Director Raymond Pecheone, and Stanford University Research Associate Alethea Andree.

The School Redesign Network (SRN) is housed at Stanford University and supported through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. SRN supports research on school redesign; is home to an extensive clearinghouse of materials for communities working to improve their schools; and hosts institutes, seminars, working groups, and leadership/study tours.

To schedule interviews, or for additional material, please contact Barbara McKenna at 831.460.9933.

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