



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

Reconfiguring the Exit Exam to
Meet Requirements of No Child Left
Behind

Senate Bill 1115, SL 2002-126
Section 7.21

April, 2005

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Introduction

In October 2002, SB 1115, SL 2002-126 Section 7.21 required the State Board of Education (SBE) to review the requirements and regulations for implementing the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and to identify any revisions needed for developing and implementing the North Carolina High School Exit Exam. In addition, the Board was required to provide a report outlining the revisions and timetable for revisions to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) before work on the Exit Exam could continue. This report provides a brief history of the development of the Exit Exam and the SBE recommendations regarding its use.

History of Exit Exam Development

In 1996, the North Carolina Education Standards and Accountability Commission recommended to the SBE that each North Carolina graduate should demonstrate proficiency in six competencies: 1. communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), 2. using numbers and data, 3. problem solving, 4. processing information, 5. technology use, and 6. teamwork.

In July 1997, the North Carolina Education Standards and Accountability Commission was dissolved, and the General Assembly created the Committee on Standards and Accountability to advise the SBE on student performance standards. The General Assembly also passed General Statute §115 C-12 (9b) *Power to Develop Exit Exams*. This policy stated that the SBE must develop a plan to implement a high school exit exam. As a result, the SBE reported to the JLEOC in December 1997 its plan to begin the process for developing the Exit Exam.

In April 1999, the SBE unanimously approved the Statewide Student Accountability Standards policy. This policy set clear requirements for student promotion at grades 3, 5, and 8 and for high school graduation. To graduate, high school students needed a passing score on the new Exit Exam (to be taken in the spring of students' 11th grade year) in addition to meeting existing local and state graduation requirements. The Statewide Student Accountability Standards were to become effective at grade 5 during the 2000–01 school year, at grades 3 and 8 during the 2001–02 school year, and at grade 11 (spring 2002) for the graduating class of 2003 and beyond. The Committee on Standards and Accountability worked with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) staff and stakeholders to establish test specifications for the Exit Exam.

The test specifications for the Exit Exam were approved by the SBE in October 1999. The test specifications included four competency areas or domains: communication, problem solving, using numbers and data, and processing information. The Exit Exam, a multiple-choice test, would be divided into a series of four tests, each of which would assess one of the four different domains. Each test of the Exit Exam would take about two hours to complete. The graduating class of 2003 and beyond would be required to pass the new Exit Exam in order to receive a diploma.

In January 2000, the Riverside Publishing Company, a national test publishing company, was awarded the contract for publishing the Exit Exam. Riverside Publishing, in

cooperation with the NCDPI and educators from across the state began test development. North Carolina teachers and curriculum experts played a major role in the development of the Exit Exam by participating in activities such as item writing reviews and test reviews.

In November 2000, because of the high-stakes nature of the test, the Technical Advisory Committee and the Compliance Commission for Accountability recommended to the SBE that the development timeline for the Exit Exam be extended by two years. In February 2001, the SBE, in agreement with the recommendations, voted to extend the timeline by two years for development and implementation of the Exit Exam. This decision would require the entering ninth graders for the 2001–02 school year (the graduating class of 2005) to be the first class required to pass the exam and receive a graduation diploma.

The Exit Exam item tryouts were administered to all 11th graders in April 2001. Riverside Publishing Company analyzed the data from the field tests and provided item data to the NCDPI in August 2001. Board members were informed of the concerns that were expressed by Riverside Publishing Company about the items that were field-tested. For using numbers and data, the average percentage of students answering a question correctly was 34%, and the reliability of the tests was very low. Low reliability indicated that what was being measured was not being measured consistently. Riverside requested that changes be made to the design of the Exit Exam or that another extension of the timeline be granted. Because of the delay in appropriating funds for the continuation of the development of the Exit Exam, test development was halted until approval of the state budget by the General Assembly.

As the result of the late approval of the state budget in October 2001, and in order to keep the Exit Exam on schedule for administration in 2004, the SBE agreed at its November 2001 meeting to redesign the test. The Board's action combined the four tests into one test of 80–100 items, and shortened the testing time from eight hours to approximately three hours total test administration time, which resulted in one passing score as opposed to four different scores for each student. The test addressed the four domains of communication, processing information, problem solving, and using numbers and data. The implementation schedule was not changed and test development continued. The graduating class of 2005 would be expected to pass the Exit Exam to receive a diploma. These students would take the test in the spring of their junior year.

The NCLB was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002. Under the NCLB, each state must measure every public school student's progress in reading and mathematics in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12. By 2007–08, assessments in science will be required. These assessments must be aligned with state academic content and achievement standards.

In April 2002, the field test of the redesigned Exit Exam was administered to approximately 34,000 11th graders who were following the College Preparation, College Technical Preparation, or Career Preparation courses of study. However, test development was halted in June until the budget was approved by the General Assembly. In October, no funds were allocated in the state budget for the development of the Exit

Exam, and budget provision, SB 1115, SL 2002-126 Section 7.21 required the SBE to review the requirements and regulations for implementing the federal legislation of the NCLB, and to identify any revisions needed for developing and implementing the Exit Exam. In addition, the SBE was required to provide a report outlining the revisions and timetable for revisions to the JLEOC before work on the Exit Exam could continue.

Impact of NCLB

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) released in November 2002 the final regulations for the accountability provisions of NCLB. The NCDPI began work on seeking approval to use end-of-course (EOC) assessments (already in place) to meet the high school requirements. A report to JLEOC needed to await a final decision by the USED related to use of EOC assessments.

In April 2003, the USED approved the basic elements of North Carolina's state accountability plan. Unfortunately, the SBE was still awaiting approval from the USED to use EOC assessments for meeting the high school requirements for NCLB.

Effective November 29, 2004, the USED granted the NCDPI permission to use EOC assessments to meet the high school testing requirements under NCLB.

Necessary Revisions to the Exit Exam

In order to use the Exit Exam to meet the NCLB requirements, revisions to the test specifications, field testing, and pilot testing would need to occur. The test would need to generate separate reading and mathematics scores. This process would take at least three years and cost approximately \$4 million. Additionally, in January 2003 the SBE started to explore other options (using EOC assessments and a senior project) as a means for having more rigorous high school exit standards.

SBE Recommendations

The SBE recommends that there be no further development efforts on the Exit Exam. The SBE further recommends that the General Assembly consider using the five EOC assessments that all students following the College Preparation, College Technical Preparation, or Career Preparation courses of study must take to graduate and a senior project (a performance-based component that may include service learning or work-based learning) as components for new high school exit standards. The EOC assessments that would be used are Algebra I, Biology, English I, Civics and Economics, and U.S. History. The new high school exit standards also could replace the current competency standard and could be in place for the students entering ninth grade for the first time in the 2006-07 school year and beyond.