



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS A COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS

- All states have specific high school (HS) graduation requirements. In a few states, these requirements are established mainly by local school districts. In most states, however, graduation requirements are established by state authorities.
- HS graduation requirements basically come in two types: Course or credit requirements and assessments. Nearly all states have specific course and/or credit requirements and most relate to “core” subjects or academic disciplines. NJ, for example, has credit requirements in 7 different subjects.
- Some states award differentiated diplomas. Diploma types denote levels of academic achievement. NJ awards one general diploma.¹

ASSESSMENTS

- While all states administer standardized assessments in high school, 22 states require a HS student to *take* an assessment(s) in order to graduate. One state requires a student to take the SAT or ACT before the end of the 11th grade in order to graduate, but a minimum score is not required²;
- In the remaining 21 states, a HS student is required to take one or more state-approved assessment. The assessment either is given when the course has been completed successfully OR given to all students at the same time regardless of when the student completed the course;
- All but three of these states administer “end-of-course” assessments. The remaining test all students at the same time regardless of when they completed the relevant courses;
- Currently, NJ employs the “end-of-course” practice. It administers the Algebra I assessment when the student completes Algebra I and English Language Arts 10 when the student completes ELA 10. (*The Appellate Court ruling held that this end-of-course assessment practice was not consistent with the statute; it ruled that one comprehensive exam had to be given in grade 11.*);
- All 21 states have assessments in ELA and math; 13 states also require assessments in other subjects, typically, science and/or U.S. History. NJ’s assessments are in ELA and math only;
- 13 of the 21 states - - including NJ - - require a student to receive a specific score on each required assessment in order to graduate. These states are: *Florida,*

¹ Information in this section comes from the Education Commission of the States, <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbprofall?Rep=HS01>.

² *Education Week*, June 15, 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/states-require-exam-to-graduate.html>.

Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, & Washington;

- In the remaining 8 states, the assessment scores are components of the final course grade. Those states are: *Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina & Tennessee;*
- In the states that have specific proficiency or score requirements for the assessment results, alternative pathways are offered to graduation should a student not attain the expected score.³

A FEW KEY STATE REQUIREMENTS

- **Massachusetts**, which regularly ranks as the top-achieving state on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – where NJ is frequently number two, requires students to [meet score benchmarks on the state exam](#) (MCAS), with alternative pathways for students with disabilities.
- **New York** has [differentiated diplomas with varying requirements](#): Local Diploma, Regents Diploma, Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. These indicate increasing levels of rigor and preparation for college and career and all include some form of assessment or examination.
- **Pennsylvania** has [new graduation requirements](#) as of October 2018 (taking effect for the class of 2022), allowing for multiple pathways in addition to passage of the state Keystone exams (the previous practice). The multiple pathways allow for a variety of measures such as taking advanced coursework, alternative assessments, gaining acceptance to a four-year higher education institution, etc.

³ Information in bullets 2&3 and 5-8 comes from Achieve, <https://www.achieve.org/our-agenda/assessments/2017-18-state-assessment-resources>.