Question: What states in the Midwest require that exit exams be taken by high school students?

By Laura Tomaka [1]
Friday, December 14, 2012 at 12:29 PM

Stateline Midwest ~ December 2012 [2]

According to the Center on Education Policy [3], Indiana, Minnesota and Ohio are among the 26 U.S. states that require students to pass an exit exam before they are awarded a high school diploma.

The number of states requiring these exams has increased over the past decade; as a result, two-thirds of the nation’s high school students must now take them.

Minnesota and Ohio are among the 17 states that administer comprehensive exit exams: standards-based tests that assess multiple subjects and that are taken by all students at a particular grade level — typically 10th or 11th grade.

Other states instead choose to have their schools administer end-of-course exams, which are given to students as they complete a specific course in order to measure mastery of the subject.

With the graduating class of 2012, Indiana schools transitioned from comprehensive exams, which had been administered since 1997, to end-of-course exams. (A handful of states require students to take both types of exams.) Before instituting its exit exams in 2004, Ohio had required students to pass a Ninth Grade Proficiency Test in order to graduate, starting in 1994.

Most states offer remediation and opportunities to take the test again when a student doesn’t pass the exam.

Many states also offer alternatives for meeting graduation requirements. For example, students in Indiana can be eligible to graduate if they meet a set of requirements, including retaking the test, maintaining a 95 percent attendance rate and maintaining a C average. Ohio similarly provides an alternate path that takes attendance, grade point average, retesting and other requirements into account.

Proponents of the exit-exam requirement say it ensures that students have mastered curriculum standards, boosts student performance and improves the value of a high school diploma.

Because the exams typically test for skills mastered through the 10th grade, they have traditionally not been considered a good measure of college readiness.

However, some states (eight of the 26, though none in the Midwest so far) have recently changed their exit or end-of-course exams so that they align with Common Core State Standards [3]: a set of common educational standards for English language arts and mathematics that 45 of the 50 states (all but Minnesota and Nebraska in the Midwest) have chosen to adopt.

The Common Core was designed to reflect the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in college and the workforce.