



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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The Impact of End-of-Course Exams on Student Achievement

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Virginia implemented end-of-course exams known as *Standards of Learning* (SOL) beginning in 1998. Virginia developed 12 end-of-course exams in: English/reading, English/writing, algebra I, algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to the present, Virginia and U.S. history, and world geography.

Beginning in 2004, Virginia required students to pass the SOL exams to obtain a high school diploma. Virginia defines “pass” as scoring advanced or proficient. To receive a Standard Diploma, students must pass six tests and to receive an Advanced Studies Diploma, students must pass nine tests.

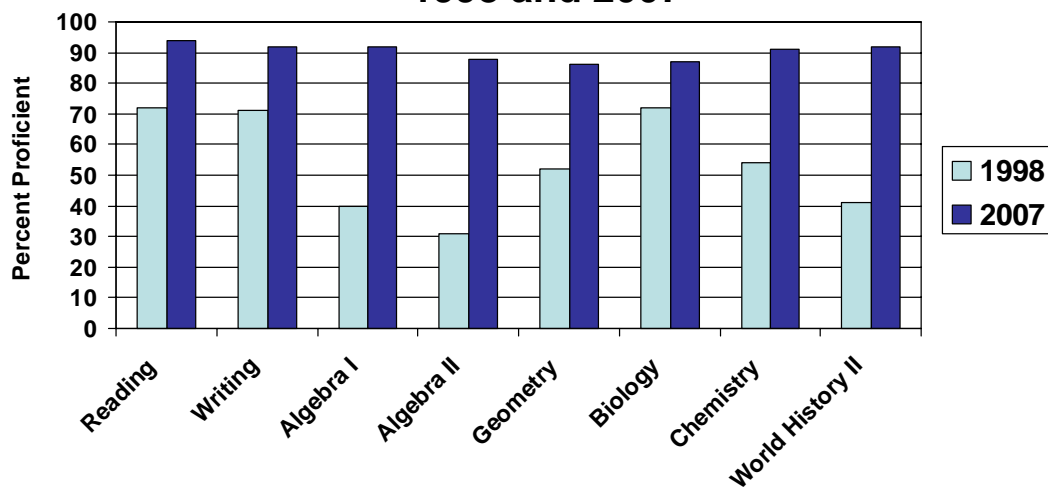
Virginia’s model is similar to the PA State Board of Education proposed rule change advancing *graduation competency assessments* (GCAs) as one option to measure student achievement to the PA academic standards for high school graduation.

Virginia’s end-of-course exams (SOL) in English, reading, algebra I, geometry and algebra II are used to meet the testing requirements of NCLB. Starting in the 2007-08 school year, the earth science, biology and chemistry tests will be used for NCLB purposes as well. This suggests that Pennsylvania might be able to make the same step if we implement GCAs.

In addition to the end-of-course exams, Virginia developed a system of supports for students and teachers as part of the state’s “Project Graduation” high school reform initiative designed to improve student achievement. Supports in Virginia include: targeted student remediation, early intervention programs beginning in middle school, summer academies, on-line tutorials, professional development for teachers, and practice assessments. The rule change in Pennsylvania also proposes supports be provided to students, teachers and districts.

Student achievement in Virginia has improved since implementing end-of-course exams (Standards of Learning) and Virginia has not experienced an increase in high school dropouts

**Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)
End-of-Course Exam Student Achievement
1998 and 2007**



Virginia's provides a variety of assessment options for students with disabilities. The most rigorous yet appropriate option is determined by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team. In some subject areas, scores for students with disabilities showed a slight decline and now are trending upward again with over 85% of students taking alternative assessments scoring proficient or advanced. It is important to note that these alternative assessments are given to students with severe cognitive disabilities and represent less than 1000 students annually while the most common end-of-course exams such as algebra I and biology are taken by over 90,000 students each.