



1. Remove the overall summative rating so parents and communities can better understand what is working well and what needs to be improved.
2. Advocate to include non-test based indicators alongside Math and Reading STAAR scores to provide a more holistic view of school effectiveness for elementary and middle schools.
3. Advocate to include a weighted “academic lift” / equity index to recognize the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and that not all students start in the same place academically.
 - Similar to what HB 3 did for the school finance system by including census block groups to determine weighted comp ed funding, an academic lift / equity index weight would adjust for factors outside the school’s control that impact student learning and achievement.
4. Require each domain and overall rating to have a weak or little correlation to family income to identify effective schools regardless of where wealthy or poor students are located.
5. Advocate to better align and increase CCMRs with workforce education; eliminate required ‘connectors’ such as only awarding credit for completing a program of study AND receiving an IBC; continue asking if the legislative intent for K-12 is ‘readiness’ or ‘attainment’?
6. Support legislation that increases flexibility and local discretion in implementing accelerated instruction; including the repeal of the mandatory 30 hours of supplementary accelerated instruction that must be administered to every student who fails a STAAR or EOC test. (HB 4545, 87R, 2021)

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2022–23 Texas Accountability Advisory Group (TAAG)
by Last Name
As of September 2022

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- Sydni Gaitan, Budget and Policy Advisor, *Office of the Governor*
- Tamoria Jones, House Public Education Committee Director, *House Public Education Committee*
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TEXAS 2022 ELECTIONS

Beto O'Rourke wants to end the STAAR tests. Here's why he can't.

The Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate has said several times he will end the annual standardized tests. State and federal law make it impossible.

BY **POOJA SALHOTRA** OCT. 7, 2022 5 AM CENTRAL

COPY LINK



Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke speaks at a rally in Austin on Sept. 6, 2022. O'Rourke has said he wants to end the state's annual standardized tests. Federal law wouldn't allow that. 📷 Eddie Gaspar/The

[Sign up for The Brief](#), our daily newsletter that keeps readers up to speed on the most essential Texas news.

Beto O'Rourke's vows to cancel the STAAR test are untenable since state and federal law preclude him from eliminating the standardized testing program on his own.

In appeals to students, teachers and education activists, O'Rourke — the Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate — has repeatedly promised to do away with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness if he's elected governor in November. O'Rourke considers the standardized tests a waste of valuable teaching time and a drain on state education funds, a claim that many education advocates have made for years.

"You told me that these high-stakes, high-pressure standardized tests in no way effectively measure the potential of that child or the effort that you are expending on her behalf," O'Rourke said during a campaign rally held at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches this week. "So when we win we're going to cancel the STAAR test in the state of Texas."

But at least some of the tests are federally required. The Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law by former President Barack Obama, also a Democrat, requires states to administer annual tests in reading and math in the third through eighth grades and once in high school.

RELATED STORY

Gov. Greg Abbott and Beto O'Rourke accused each other of misinforming Texans during their debate. Here are the facts.

OCT. 1, 2022

Supporters of standardized tests say the exams provide teachers with valuable information on student progress and increase transparency for families. The modern national requirement for the standardized testing system was first put in place by former President George W. Bush when he signed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002.

However, standardized testing has long faced backlash from advocacy organizations and teachers, who say the high stakes put undue pressure on students and teachers and distract from a school's purpose.

"It's a waste of taxpayer dollars," Texas State Teachers Association spokesperson Clay Robison said in an email. "Standardized testing in public schools should be used for diagnostic purposes, not for keeping score and accountability reasons."

Texas goes beyond the federal requirements by requiring students to take a science test and a social studies test in eighth grade. High school students take subject-specific tests at the end of the year, and the state ties the test results to accountability scores.

But to eliminate these state requirements, O'Rourke would need support from the Legislature.

"I'd love for Beto to make this a real centerpiece because I think we're ready to make a shift in the state of Texas," said Angela Valenzuela, a professor in education policy at the University of Texas at Austin. While he can support current efforts to eliminate the extra state requirements, "He can't get rid of the federally required tests."

O'Rourke's campaign team clarified in a Thursday email that even though O'Rourke cannot singlehandedly get rid of the test, he'd align the state with federal requirements and remove high-stakes consequences.

"There is nothing in federal law that requires states to use test results punitively toward students," said Beto for Texas spokesperson Tori Larned. "While standardized tests serve as critical measures to identify student learning gaps and inform classroom instruction, they should never be the only tools used for grade advancement or high school graduation."

Larned added that O'Rourke would require an independent evaluation of the validity, readability and instructional sensitivity of the STAAR test to guarantee its fairness.

Historically, students in Texas have had to pass the reading and math tests to advance to sixth or ninth grade, and high school students have had to pass their tests to graduate. The Texas Education Agency also uses the test results to generate grades, from A through F, for each school. Schools that receive "D" or "F" ratings can face sanctions, including state takeover.

Lawmakers eliminated the grade retention requirement during the last legislative session and required districts to offer tutoring to any student who doesn't meet grade-level expectations.

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Education allowed states to apply to waive the tests due to the coronavirus pandemic, but states resumed testing in 2021.

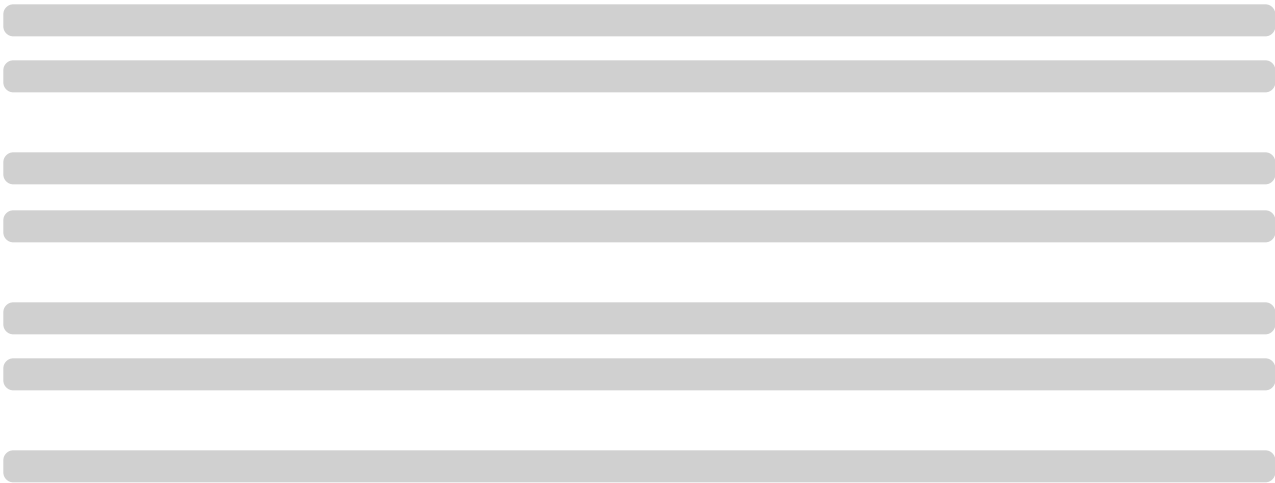
Some lawmakers have called on Republican Gov. [Greg Abbott](#) and the state education department to cancel tests this year as well. State Sen. [José Menéndez](#), a San Antonio Democrat, wrote in a January [letter](#) to the governor that the STAAR tests are “poorly designed” and “out of sync with learning standards.”

Abbott's office referred questions about the exams to his campaign team. They did not immediately respond to questions about whether the governor agrees with O'Rourke on eliminating the test.

Texas is one of only 11 states in the nation that require high school exit exams for graduation.

Disclosure: Texas State Teachers Association and University of Texas at Austin have been financial supporters of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization that is funded in part by donations from members, foundations and corporate sponsors. Financial supporters play no role in the Tribune's journalism. Find a complete [list of them here](#).

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Can a governor put an end to Texas' STAAR testing?

Beto O'Rourke wants to cancel the state assessment to give teachers "more time" with students



Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke speaks to students at Dallas College's El Centro Campus on Monday in Dallas. The college tour is focused on reaching young voters across the state. (Shafkat Anowar / Staff Photographer)



By [Meghan Mangrum](#)

6:00 AM on Oct 4, 2022



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In This Story

**Greg Abbott**

Update: 11:24 a.m.: This story has been corrected to reflect new laws on grade promotion.

Democrat Beto O'Rourke has repeated one refrain in attempts to appeal to teachers and parents: do away with the STAAR test — at least for now.

O'Rourke pushed the idea previously and has frequently criticized the state's emphasis on standardized testing and the lack of student achievement.

Along with his proposal to increase state funding for teacher pay and make school safety a larger priority, O'Rourke again pitched the idea [during Friday's debate against his opponent, Gov. Greg Abbott](#).

While accusing Abbott of not doing enough to combat teacher burnout and shortages, O'Rourke said he would support educators, in part, by giving them “more time to teach” by doing away with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness tests.

He repeated the proposal at an event for young voters at Dallas College on Monday.

“What if we allowed you to focus on those children in front of you and draw forth that curiosity and that lifelong love of learning once you still got to get that going? There's no stopping that kid or any of the rest of us,” O'Rourke said at the El

Centro campus. “So to give him more time to do that, I propose we [cancel] the STAAR test in the state of Texas.”

Related: What you missed from Greg Abbott, Beto O'Rourke's debate in Texas governor's race

But can a governor cancel STAAR?

Students are required to take STAAR tests.

Annual [student testing is required](#) by federal law, so Texas requires public schools to assess students starting in third grade.

As a result, children take STAAR exams for math, reading, writing, science and social studies. Secondary students take end-of-course tests related to such courses.

Educators and state officials argue that the tests help evaluate where students are academically and how much progress they've made that school year.

Related: Will Texas college voters turn out for O'Rourke vs. Abbott election?

Test results have high stakes for students, schools and communities.

STAAR test results historically had high stakes for students in some school years.

Students had to [pass the reading and math tests](#) to advance to sixth or ninth grade. Last year, lawmakers eliminated the retention requirements for those grades. Generally, any student who does not pass STAAR in key grades and/or subject areas must have a learning committee develop an educational plan and receive tutoring or be assigned to a certified master, exemplary or recognized teacher.

High school students had to pass their end-of-course assessments before they can graduate. Now, if they miss or fail an exam, they can try again, have a graduation committee approve promotion or score high enough on a substitute test (such as the SAT or ACT).

Schools and districts, in turn, are graded by the state on how well they are educating kids. They receive letter grades for that academic accountability largely based on STAAR.

Meanwhile, higher-rated schools can increase the home value in neighborhoods while failing campuses can bring them down.



Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke speaks to students at Dallas College's El Centro Campus on Monday in Dallas. The college tour is focused on reaching young voters across the state. (Shafkat Anowar / Staff Photographer)

So what could Beto O'Rourke do?

Abbott was able [to cancel STAAR testing in 2020](#) when Texas was under a disaster proclamation, after schools suddenly closed and faced uncertainty following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The governor had to seek a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education. However, federal officials granted such waivers when COVID-19 hit but dialed back on their use the following year. In 2021, federal officials acknowledged the need for flexibility, but emphasized the [“important role”](#) assessments play in education.

Texas has used the STAAR assessment for more than a decade.

Some educators are in favor of revamping the test to better align it with what students are actually being taught. Others want a measure of student growth and progress, especially for children who start the school year behind.

Generally, lawmakers would have to be on board for a governor's administration to tackle a complete revamp of the state's assessment, which would be a significant undertaking.

State leaders have been reluctant to cancel high-stakes testing.

Texas remains under a [disaster proclamation](#) due to COVID-19 as Abbott renewed that proclamation last month.

However, he has not canceled STAAR testing since 2020 despite [calls from lawmakers, educators and other advocates to do so](#).

Previously, state officials have waived state academic accountability for schools, but still require students to test.

During Hurricane Harvey, for example, officials did not pause STAAR testing for the Houston area that was greatly disrupted for weeks following the storm. However, education commissioner Mike Morath suspended accountability consequences for schools in that area.

In some instances, STAAR test results [were tossed after technology glitches](#) caused results to be unreliable.

Related: After tense Greg Abbott, Beto O'Rourke debate, what's next in Texas governor's race

Individual students can opt-out of testing, but it's rare.

Texas Education Agency officials note that a parental right to opt a child out of STAAR testing doesn't exist. However, some parents [refuse to allow their children to take the test](#). Typically, the process depends on the relationship between the parent and school district as well as the grade level of the student.

However, unlike opt-out movements that have sprung up in pockets around the nation, the number of Texas students and families refusing to take the STAAR test is relatively small, though the state doesn't formally track how many students do opt-out.

Staff writer Valeria Olivares contributed to this report.

Correction, 11:24 a.m.: This story has been corrected to reflect last year's law eliminating grade retention due to STAAR.

The DMN Education Lab deepens the coverage and conversation about urgent education issues critical to the future of North Texas.

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Redesigning N.C.'s School Performance Grades



Staff (<https://www.ednc.org/author/staff/>)

September 22, 2022



REPUBLIC THIS STORY

K-12 (<https://www.ednc.org/category/k-12/>)

The N.C. Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has convened an advisory group to redesign the state's **school performance grades** (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/2021-22-school-performance-grades>) between now and January 2023. This survey, run by EducationNC, seeks to gather your input

on how school performance should be evaluated. All results will be used anonymously in aggregate, and a final report will be provided to DPI ahead of its next meeting in October.

This survey will close at 5 p.m. on Monday, October 10. Once the survey closes, the results will be posted publicly. Thank you for your participation.

[Translate](#)

What is your zip code?

Please select the **one** role/industry that is most relevant to your survey responses.

☐ Business/industry☐ K-12 Teacher☐ K-12 School leader/principal☐ K-12 District leader☐ Superintendent☐ Non-profit☐ Parent/guardian/grandparent☐ State/local government☐ Student☐ University/college faculty/staff☐ Other

Select a response

Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements.

K-12 teachers and schools should be evaluated by an equal combination of student achievement - i.e. test scores - and student growth - i.e. growth in a students' test scores from year to year.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

K-12 schools should be publicly graded on their performance so that parents, community members, and policymakers can compare them.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

Some level of standardized testing is necessary to understand how students are doing.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

School performance grades should not be publicized; parents, students, and all community members should know the quality of their school through involvement in their child's education and attendance at school events.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

School performance grades should include measures beyond test scores and student growth.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

The current formula for school performance grades, which is calculated using a weight of 80 percent student achievement and 20 percent student growth, should remain in place.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

The North Carolina legislature needs to reform school performance grades.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

K-12 schools should be required to develop and publicize procedures to allow students who are ready to move more quickly through the curriculum and graduate at an earlier age.

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

K-12 schools should have different measures of success for elementary, middle, and high schools

☐

Agree

☐

Disagree

☐

Unsure

In addition to student test scores, should the following be used to measure school quality?

Advanced or honors courses offered

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

Closing gaps between different student groups

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

Courses offered outside of core academics (i.e., arts, world languages, career and technical education)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Discipline (i.e., suspensions and expulsions)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Durable skills (i.e., communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, persistence)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Earning college credit in high school (i.e., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Career and College Promise, Community College)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Entrance exams (College: ACT, PSAT, SAT; Career: WorkKeys; Military: ASVAB)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, athletics, afterschool program)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Health of students (i.e., physical fitness, mental health, social-emotional health)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
High school graduation rate	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Innovative teaching and learning practices (i.e., Project-Based Learning, Competency-Based Education, Digital Learning, Virtual or Blended Courses)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Intracurricular activities (i.e., JROTC, DECA, Future Farmers of America, SkillsUSA, etc)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Parent engagement/satisfaction	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Per pupil expenditures	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
Postsecondary pathways (i.e.,enrolled (2-year/community college, 4-year/university); employed; enlisted	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
School climate (overall social and learning climate)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
School environment/cleanliness	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure
School safety (i.e., incidents of school crime, violence, school resource officer)	☐	☐	☐
	Yes	No	Unsure

Student attendance/absenteeism

☐ ☐ ☐

Student attendance/absenteeism

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

Teacher attendance/absenteeism

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

Work-based learning experiences (i.e., internships, apprenticeships)

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

Workforce credentials or industry-based certifications

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Unsure

If you have additional ideas about what should be considered when Redesigning N.C.'s School Performance Grades please include them here *(20 word limit)*.

Comment

To receive updates from DPI on the progress of their school performance grade redesign efforts or to receive invitations to focus groups on this topic, leave your email below. *This*

https://www.ednc.org/category/k-12/)"/>


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Survey Seeks Input on Model for Measuring School Quality

Raleigh, NC

Sep 22, 2022

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is beginning a process to overhaul school performance grades and is seeking public input through a new survey (<https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/>). The state's A-F performance grades were developed so communities could better understand the quality of North Carolina's public schools, but a growing consensus has led many to believe that the current model does not accurately reflect all aspects of school quality because it puts too much weight on student achievement as determined by high-stakes testing.

Launching today is a survey (<https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/>) designed in partnership with Education NC (<https://www.ednc.org/>) (EdNC), an independent news and data source, to gather feedback from critical stakeholders including parents, educators, students, and community members about the state's current school grading approach and how school quality might be better measured. This survey is the first step of a three-phase approach, which includes research, design and implementation. The public is encouraged to complete the survey (<https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/>).

Since 2013-14 school year, North Carolina public schools, including charters, have received an A-F letter grade that reflects school performance measured primarily by student performance on the state's End of Grade (EOG) and End of Course (EOC) exams. Under state law, grades are based on each school's achievement score (weight of 80%) and each school's students' academic growth (weight of 20%). The total school performance score is then converted to a 100-point scale and then used to determine a school performance grade of A, B, C, D or F.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt said changes to the school grading system are needed not only to measure school performance more accurately, but also to help drive better student outcomes since accountability measures have a strong influence on the priorities for teaching and learning in schools.

“School performance grades are really about school quality, but right now the model overemphasizes student test scores while not accounting for the other ways schools are preparing students for post-secondary success,” Truitt said. “The model should incorporate other important metrics – not just high-stakes student testing – to redefine school quality. This survey is the first step of many, as we look to solicit feedback from across the state and select indicators that help paint a more complete picture of school quality. We hope that parents, community members and educators will give of their time to complete it.”

A working group convened earlier this month to begin discussions on redesigning the state's school performance grades. The group's initial meeting was facilitated by the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (<https://www.nciea.org/>) and involved a wide range of stakeholders, including public school superintendents, public charter school leaders, the 2022 North Carolina Principal and Teacher of the Year, district accountability leaders, UNC and NC Community College representatives, the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, legislators, and representatives from Best NC, myFutureNC, the NC Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Commerce and the Governor's Office.

While any new model must comply with federal requirements, additional indicators and measures can be included to better reflect North Carolina's priorities and values and balance the model's current metrics of growth and testing. During the working group meeting, members discussed many potential indicators outside of test scores that could be included, such as school climate, school safety, parent engagement, and career/college readiness.

The public survey (<https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/>) will be used to gather feedback for a proposed draft of initial indicators while also providing the opportunity for feedback on indicators not yet considered.

The school performance grade redesign effort has its roots in Operation Polaris (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/operation-polaris>), the agency's four-year strategic plan Truitt launched in September of 2021. That plan includes a goal to develop a multi-measure model of school performance that places greater emphasis on North Carolina educational values.

“While academic proficiency in our schools remains of utmost importance, there are other indicators that should be considered in the overall model,” said Deputy Superintendent Michael Maher, who oversees the Office of Innovation, which is charged with the school performance grade redesign work. “This process is heavily focused on feedback so that we can learn what North Carolinians deem important that should be considered when determining the quality of a school.”

The [survey \(https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/\)](https://www.ednc.org/school-performance-grade-survey/), published today, will remain open until October 10. Once the survey closes, the results will be posted publicly. NCDPI and the Accountability working group will then begin conducting feedback sessions with key stakeholder groups, both in person and virtually, to continue discussions and to help refine the list of potential indicators.

This press release is related to:

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<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2022/09/22/survey-seeks-input-model-measuring-school-quality>

Opinion

Opinion: Diploma recommendations about removing barriers, not lowering standards

Published: Sep. 25, 2022, 6:00 a.m.



Recommendations to remove high-stakes testing and ensure uniform equitable grading of work samples will help ensure students can spend their time pursuing classes more relevant to their futures, not jumping through unnecessary hoops, the author writes. (Jake May | MLive.com)

NEW!

By Guest Columnist | The Oregonian

Gill is director of the Oregon Department of Education.

At the Oregon Department of Education, we are committed to doing what's best for Oregon's students. It's unfortunate that The Oregonian/OregonLive Editorial Board is promoting the false narrative that maintaining meaningless hoops for students to jump through will somehow help them graduate and be better prepared for life (["Editorial: A better fix for graduation than downgrading diplomas,"](#) Sept. 11).

High stakes graduation testing is a relic of No Child Left Behind—many states have long since dropped these tests, because they don't help students with their next steps. A high-stakes standardized test does not define our students' future. Instead, we must focus on providing our students with the meaningful, engaging and rigorous courses they need to be prepared for life after high school.

Oregon's graduation requirements were last updated in 2007. And Oregon has grown more diverse and will grow even more so with time. What our youth need to graduate from high school, prepared for success in higher education and the workplace, has changed.

To improve our education system, we must be willing to engage actively and listen to the students and families our current system is failing and take action. Senate Bill 744 directed the Oregon Department of Education to listen to those families, study Oregon's graduation outcomes and look at diploma requirements in other states; then use that information to develop recommendations. That's it.

Here are the facts about graduation rates in Oregon. Our graduation rates have steadily improved for the last decade but remain among the lowest in the nation. We have some of the most challenging diploma and credit requirements in the nation. And unfortunately, Oregon's schools have not been funded equitably, nor have our diploma requirements been designed to ensure every student has a path to graduation.

The current system is not working for all students, especially those representing the majority of our student body. Our students navigating poverty, students of color, members of tribal nations, those who have a first language that is not English, move between schools during high school, attend online schools, experience disability or identify as LGBTQ+ are not being equitably served.

For the education department's SB 744 report, we listened to more than 3,500 individuals – families and educators who shared that their children experience inequitable outcomes. The recommendations call for holding our system accountable

to remove inequitable and extraneous barriers to high-quality instruction and programming.

We also heard that Oregon's high-stakes standardized tests are preventing students from joining classes that matter to them like career and technical education, advanced placement courses and others that offer college credits and real-world experiences. Additionally, as currently implemented, an alternate pathway to show proficiency through work samples is similarly diverting students from those valuable opportunities. So, we recommended that we end reliance on a test that is not working and takes time from relevant learning; and instead, require uniform equitable grading practices that ensure our students demonstrate proficiency with verification from the educators who are best able to assess their skills in context.

We heard the traditional math sequence is not relevant to many of our students' futures and that it is blocking them from accessing math instruction that is applicable to what they want to do after high school. We recommended a new math pathway that requires alignment to Oregon's rigorous math standards but can be taught in math classes that are more relevant to their post high school goals.

We heard that our youth need life and work skills when they leave high school. So we proposed reviewing and adding to Oregon's list of essential skills required for a diploma and creating a "Future Planning" course to emphasize financial literacy, resume development, interviewing skills, financial aid application processes, work ethic, professionalism and more.

The education system isn't working for everyone. It never has—especially if you look at the changing demographics of Oregon's student body. More students are coming to school with specific needs—children experiencing poverty, speaking a language other than English, and experiencing mental health challenges. Every single one of these children also brings strength and resilience.

We need to change. Investments like the Student Success Act and High School Success program can provide the resources. We also need additional tools to hold our system accountable. Our current system was not designed to serve all students. There is built in bias and institutionalized racism. The state needs authority to ensure equitable grading practices and other efforts are implemented to overcome implicit bias across all our schools.

Our kids don't need hoops to jump through, they need relevant, high-quality instruction and life skills. Oregon's educators are ready to deliver this kind of instruction. They always have been. Our kids are the future of Oregon – let's prepare

them for that future.

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Education Lab

Alabama considers adding new high school graduation requirement

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Students and staff walk through Signed-in readers snowman at a high flying school in a recent Alabama Education Lab analysis. Trisha Powell Crain/AL.com.

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Alabama's high school seniors may have one more box to check before they graduate.

The state Board of Education is considering a requirement that every Alabama public school student prove they are ready for college or a career by graduation day.

"We have a lot of students that check multiple boxes," Alabama State Superintendent Eric Mackey told board members during a recent work session. "The problem is we have students who don't check any of the nine boxes."

"We think our graduates ought to check at least one of these nine boxes."

Those boxes, measures of college or career readiness, are:

- A qualifying score on an Advanced Placement exam,
- A qualifying score on an International Baccalaureate exam,
- A benchmark score on the ACT college entrance exam,
- Earning college credit while in high school,
- Acceptance into a branch of the military prior to graduation,
- A qualifying score on the ACT WorkKeys test,
- A career tech credential,
- A qualifying youth apprenticeship, or
- Attaining career and technical education completer status.

"We've really not done a major overview of high school graduation requirements since the 90s," Mackey said. "There's been some tinkering with it, but there's not been a major overhaul."

The new requirement would become effective for next year's ninth graders. The first graduating class that would have to meet the requirement is the class of 2028.

The change signals the board's shift back to attaching an academic requirement to the Alabama high school diploma. The state dropped the high school graduation exam in 2014 citing it as an unnecessary barrier for some students.

Read more: [What does it take to earn an Alabama high school diploma?](#)

Critics at the time said Alabama's high school diploma lost value when the only requirement to graduate was to get passing grades.

Just prior to dropping the graduation exam, the state adopted seven different types of accomplishments—called college and career readiness (CCR) indicators—that would serve as evidence that students had what it took to head to college or start their career, but they didn't make it a graduation requirement at the time.

Education officials noticed pretty quickly that not all graduates were checking one of the then-seven boxes showing they were college or career ready. In 2016, 87% of students graduated on time, but only 66% earned a CCR indicator, a difference of 21 percentage points.

By 2018, the gap shrunk to 11 percentage points (90% graduated, 79% earned a CCR indicator), but the gap grew again during the pandemic years.

In the class of 2021, 92% of students graduated, but only 76% earned a CCR indicator—a gap of 16 percentage points.

In some high schools, the gap between the graduation rate and the CCR rate was as wide as 50 percentage points.

The change could leave some students needing to find room in their schedule to earn one of the indicators.

The requirement might be tough for student-athletes, Mackey said, because student-athletes may have little room in their schedule for coursework that would fulfill the new requirement.

But with 5 ½ credits (one credit equals two semesters) available to take as electives, with some restrictions, Mackey said the CCR requirement is doable.

Read more: [Are Alabama's high school graduates ready for the next step?](#)

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Mackey told board members he is concerned about students in schools that may not have the full array of opportunities to earn an indicator. The state will work to improve those opportunities, he said, in the years leading up to the requirement taking effect.

High school juniors take the ACT college entrance exam, and seniors take the WorkKeys, which tests how well students can apply what they've learned in school to the workplace. The WorkKeys is geared toward students intending to begin work after graduating.

Mackey noted some schools—those where graduates are believed to be heading for college—choose not to give the WorkKeys test, but more than 95% of schools do give the test.

Not all schools offer two of the test-based options—Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses—he said, and opportunities for dual enrollment, typically in a two-year college, depend on the relationships between the school and the college.

Career and technical education opportunities are also unequal, he said, with some districts operating their own career tech center and others sharing a regional center that serves multiple districts. Travel time to those regional centers can eat up instruction time, he said, which can be another barrier for student-athletes to participate.

“We’ve got the accountability for schools now, because of the report card,” he said, “but this puts more accountability on graduates than we’ve had since the graduation exam, and I don’t think that’s a bad thing. I think we have to hold our graduates accountable. They need to be responsible for their academic achievement.”

The board will begin the adoption process at the September board meeting, which will open a 45-day public comment period. The final vote will take place at the November board meeting.

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