



## Preparing High School Students for Careers Policies Supporting Competency-Based Education

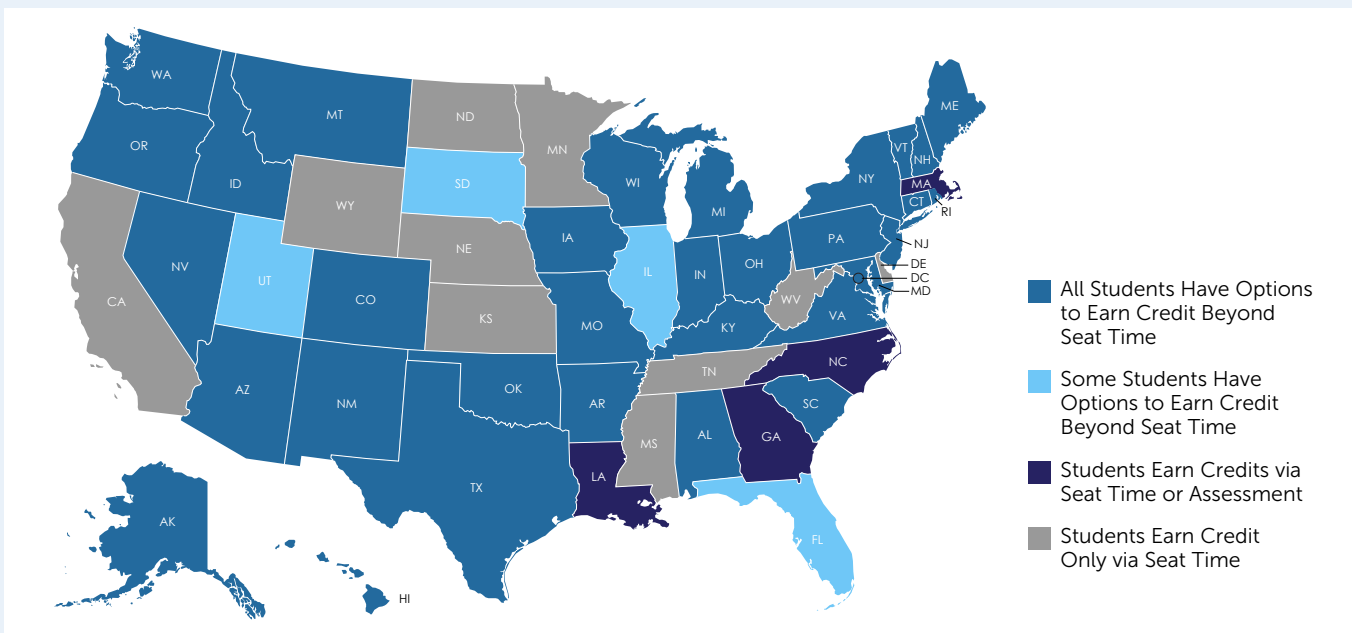
### Earning High School Credits

The best career-ready pathways offer students high-quality workplace experiences and project-based learning alongside rigorous academics. However, state policies that recognize only traditional course completion to award students credits toward graduation can make it difficult for students to participate in these kinds of career pathways and discourage states and districts from creating them. More flexible policies that allow students to earn credits by demonstrating competency (often through portfolios or performance-based assessments) in addition to seat time can help. This enables states to allow students to earn high school credit for career-focused courses, experiences, and assessments.

Forty states and the District of Columbia allow students flexibility in earning high school credits.

- In the vast majority of these states, students may receive course credit by earning a specific score on a standardized assessment, meeting criteria on a performance-based assessment, participating in nontraditional learning experiences such as work-based learning, or submitting a portfolio of work.
- In four states (Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina), the only flexibility offered to students (outside of meeting seat-time requirements) is credit by exam. In other words, students may earn credit by

### State Policies for Earning High School Credit Toward Graduation



meeting benchmarks on a standardized assessment approved by the state.

- In another four states (Florida, Illinois, South Dakota, and Utah), *some* students can earn high school credits toward graduation requirements outside of a traditional course, but that option is not available to all students. All four states are piloting proficiency-based credit programs that allow flexibility for students in participating schools. In addition, Florida provides some proficiency-based credit options to students with disabilities.

**In the remaining ten states, students can earn high school credit only by “seat time”** (California, Delaware, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming). Students in these states accumulate credits toward their diplomas by enrolling in and passing a set of courses aligned with high school graduation standards.

### Innovative High School Exit Exams

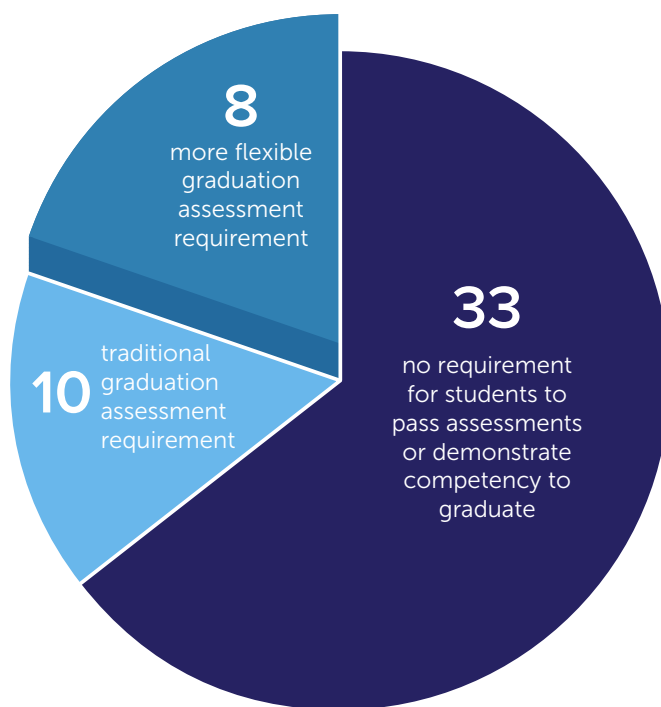
While all states have built high school graduation guidelines around credit-hour requirements in core subject areas, several states also have used high school exit exams as a second mechanism to signify the postsecondary readiness of graduates and ensure students master the academic content necessary to succeed beyond high school. Historically, exit exam policies relied on traditional, statewide standardized assessments. However, exit exams have shifted as many states eliminated or updated their graduation assessment requirements. Indeed, thirty-two states and the District of Columbia do not require all

students to pass assessments or demonstrate competency for high school graduation.

**Of the eighteen states with graduation assessment requirements, ten states have more traditional—and less flexible—options:** Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. These policies function similarly to exit exams of the past that require all students to meet benchmarks on statewide standardized assessments to graduate from high school with states offering students some alternatives, like completing college entrance exams or earning dual credit, if they cannot meet the benchmarks.

**The remaining eight states have, to varying degrees, adopted more innovative, flexible, competency-based approaches to high school graduation assessment requirements:** Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Some of the innovative policies, like those in New Mexico, allow students to demonstrate competency for graduation purposes by meeting benchmarks on a standardized test selected from a menu, by demonstrating their knowledge through a local proficiency-based assessment or portfolio of work, or another alternative. Rhode Island, on the other hand, uses only performance-based assessments—eschewing traditional standardized assessments altogether. In most of the eight states, students may demonstrate competency for graduation on exams that measure career readiness, such as an industry-recognized credentialing exam, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), or ACT WorkKeys®.

### Number of States with Graduation Assessment Requirements



## Colorado: Creating Options for Demonstrating Graduation Readiness

Colorado's *Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations* is an example of how one state provides students multiple ways to demonstrate college and career readiness (CCR) for high school graduation, including through a number of career-ready options like the National Career Readiness Certificate on ACT WorkKeys®, the ASVAB, and an industry certificate or credential. The menu also suggests a number of competency-based options, including capstone projects (evaluated by a portfolio of student work) and a "collaboratively developed, standards-based performance assessment" that would require students to create a complex product or presentation.

The graduating Class of 2021 is the first cohort required to meet the state's new graduation guidelines. However, in Colorado, local school districts ultimately are responsible for establishing their own high school graduation requirements. Under the new rules, local school boards are required to adopt a local menu of CCR demonstrations from the state-provided list. They may adopt some, or all, of the options on the menu—and may choose to raise the benchmarks students must meet in math and English language arts to earn a diploma.



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