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STATE-MANDATED MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING

AS A REQUIREMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

STATE-MANDATED MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING
AS A REQUIREMENT FOR
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

By

Carol Isabelle Dean

The purpose of this study was to obtain, analyze and compare data regarding state-mandated minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation. More specifically, the purpose was to (1) identify specified components of minimum competency testing programs within the limits of the exploratory questions, and (2) gain information which might provide some philosophical insight concerning the place of minimum competency testing in education in the United States.

The procedure used in gathering information by writing each state department of education in the United States and requesting information concerning the development of minimum competency testing programs for high school graduation in each of the respective regional areas. Thirty-nine state departments responded to the request. Examination of the literature from the several states provided evidence to support the existence of the widespread development of basic skills programs mandated by the states.

The patterns in the several states indicated that the information was best illustrated by a case study of states with intensive operational programs. These were chosen according to certain criteria as providing the most useful current picture of secondary school competency testing for graduation.

The major findings of this study may be summarized as follows:

Findings on Practices

1. An overview of the state activity shows that some programs are currently under consideration, some are in the planning stage, some are being field tested, and some are being completed to meet implementation dates.

2. High school graduation competency requirements are mandated at the state level.

3. Basic competencies necessary for coping in everyday life as well as skills fundamental to further learning are required.

4. State-developed competency tests are administered statewide during grades 9-11.

5. Remedial provision for students who do not pass the testing is the responsibility of local school districts.

6. Local assessment for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities is required.

7. Traditional requirements for graduation include the completion of prescribed course credits which include both local and state requirements.

8. State policies mandate competency testing as one requirement for graduation.

9. Certificates of competency are awarded to students who do not meet all the competency requirements for graduation.

Philosophical Concerns

Although the technical aspects of minimum competency testing need attention, the effect that these testing programs will have on the

lives of the students must be considered. The following concerns were considered relevant:

1. Educators should be cognizant of the variability of student achievement and base decisions concerning student performance on relevant research evidence instead of on general assumptions concerning student ability.

2. A testing program should not be allowed to interfere with meeting the needs of individual students.

3. Mandating a single test to measure all students at the same time on specified skill attainment may result in a segment of the school population's being labeled incompetent.

4. Minimum competency testing may lead to special remedial classes which separate the students into tracks of groups, may lead to grade retentions, and may cause individual students to drop out of school.

5. Remediation implies a need to focus attention on areas where the student is mentally and emotionally equipped to learn.

6. Those considering minimum competency testing programs should monitor the progress made in other states and consider implications for their decisions.

DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Alvan Grady Dean,

whose gentle kindness and

constant faith in his children

will always be remembered and cherished.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

> Nearly universally, modern civilized cultures decry the deterioration of their language, their schools, and their currency (45:140).

According to Glass, people today believe that they are witnessing an "inflation of the high school diploma." They sense that the "true value of the certificate is dropping as fast as the buying power of the dollar" (45:142).

> A high school diploma is a paper certificate, not unlike printed money. It has value in the market place. Like currency, it is subject to inflation as students--sometimes with the complicity of teachers--seek to earn the diploma by expending less effort, even as workers demand higher wages for the same or less work. When the inflated value of the diploma becomes apparent to taxpayers, attempts will be made to revalue the diploma just as inflated paper currency is revalued against precious metal (45:141).

Concern about schools which graduate students lacking in minimum competence with regard to the basic skills has resulted in public demands for demonstrated proficiency. Minimal competency standards and testing programs are being mandated in many states as a requirement for high school graduation.

The validity of the diploma as a reliable indicator of achievement is questioned by the public. Critics claim that American high schools are graduating students who do not meet even basic standards of functional literacy (116). The public seems to be demanding that the

diploma be more clearly defined since, at present, it appears to guarantee nothing more than that its possessor has completed twelve years of attendance in school (103). The reality that a diploma is granted to students who lack the basic skills necessary to function in today's society is considered one of the main reasons for the decline in the public's confidence in the public schools today (52).

Competency legislation has resulted, to a large degree, from the growing public demand for increased emphasis on the basic skills. State policy statements illustrate this trend toward the basic skills:

> The Legislature finds that the high school graduation requirements are generally related to "seat time" and tied to college entrance requirements.
> The Legislature further finds that some pupils currently graduating from the public schools lack competence in essential communication and computation skills, and in the confidence that they can cope successfully with a complex society (16).

> The general populace across the nation believes children are getting short-changed in their acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic....Numerous individuals and groups have expressed concern over the numbers of students graduating from...schools who appear to be ill-prepared to apply basic skills in everyday life situations (79).

> The Basic Competency Program was developed in response to widespread concern on the part of colleges, employers, and the general public that students were not learning the fundamentals of reading, writing, mathematics, and reasoning (109).

An array of factors has contributed to the widespread public pressure for the development of pre-specified competencies as a requirement for high school graduation.

Publicity in the popular media has focused attention on reports of various studies of literacy in the United States. Davis (25) discusses several recent studies conducted to determine the number of illiterate

persons in the United States. The Northcutt study in 1975 revealed that 16.4 percent of the American adults cannot cope successfully on tasks requiring writing skills, and 21.7 percent cannot cope successfully on tasks requiring reading skills. One of every five Americans did not "possess those skills and knowledges which are requisite to adult competence" (25:52).

According to the 1973 U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare study, Literacy Among Youth, reading tests given to a sampling of 6768 youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen showed that 4.8 percent could not read at the prescribed level of fourth grade. This figure, projected nationwide, represented approximately one million teenagers (77).

A survey in 1971 by the Harris organization found that close to nineteen million Americans over the age of sixteen had difficulty coping with minimal measures of literacy such as application forms (81).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that one in eight high school graduates cannot read well enough to understand a simple traffic sign. Douglas (27) reports that other estimates of functionally illiterate graduates range from ten to twenty percent nationally.

On the other hand, Tyler (9) explains that most people don't realize that the schools have slowly been reaching a larger and larger proportion of people.

> At the time of the First World War, two million men were inducted into the service, and the Army Alpha tests were given for the first time. We discovered that only about thirty-five percent of the young adults inducted into the army were literate (that is, at fourth-grade reading level or above). By the time of the Second World War, it was up to fifty-five percent. And according to the

> last National Assessment, the level is now about eighty percent. The public generally does not understand this slow process of developing an educational system intended to reach everybody (9:101).

Many students have found their abilities and skills unacceptable in their post-secondary education studies. Complaints are voiced in colleges and universities that many intelligent high school graduates are deficient in reading and writing skills. University officials are alarmed by the increasing need to provide remedial classes in English and reading for entering freshmen. For example, the University of California at Berkeley, which maintains reasonably high admissions standards, requires approximately thirty percent of each freshman class to take remedial English classes (58).

The Georgia Board of Regents mandated an English testing program which requires an English grammar and composition examination for all students at all Georgia state-supported colleges as a requirement for graduation. Low grades on these state-mandated college tests have supported the adoption of minimal competency examinations in the elementary and secondary schools of Georgia (78).

The Association of American Publishers in 1975 prepared a textbook study guide for college freshmen. The readability level was calculated for twelfth grade skills and, subsequently, had to be geared down to a ninth grade reading level (90).

Employers voice dissatisfaction with the skills of many employees. Company executives, involved in hiring new employees, are "concerned about the inability of many high school graduates to comprehend simple reading material" (12). A national company which annually interviews tens of thousands of high school graduates for jobs states that forty

percent who apply fail because they can't read or write on the eighth grade level (81).

The Newsweek cover story "Why Johnny Can't Write" drew widespread interest and concern:

> If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure or lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there. If they are not planning to attend college, their skills in writing English may not even qualify them for secretarial or clerical work....The U. S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates (98:38).

The Reader's Digest article "Are We Becoming a Nation of Illiterates?" warned the readers that "there is indisputable evidence today that millions of presumably educated Americans can neither read nor write at satisfactory levels" (81:81).

A prime-time CBS special news report on American education offered in the public schools today asked, "Is Anyone Out There Learning?" The report examined several "supposed ills" of education, including the proliferation of courses, grade inflation, social promotion, high absenteeism, lack of discipline, use of drugs, watered-down textbooks, and television. Minimum competency testing was labeled "the hottest trend" in education today (57).

Declines in test scores nationwide have been presented as evidence of a decline in the overall quality of education today. Most frequently cited is the decline in the scores of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. The average verbal scores dropped from 478 in 1963 to 434 in 1975 (94). It may be noted that the scores have stabilized at 429 since 1977 (106). The Wirtz Advisory Panel (95) stated that possible causes for the

decline include the equal opportunities of the 1960's, the "pervasive" social forces of the 1970's, and a general lowering of the educational standards evidenced in the schools.

> Our firmest conclusion is that the critical factors in the relationship between curricular change and the SAT scores are that less thoughtful and critical reading is now being demanded and that careful writing has apparently gone out of style (95:291).

Farr (31) suggests a very limited and cautious use of the SAT scores as an indication of general achievement of all students in our schools. These tests attempt to predict how well high school students who hope to go to college will succeed when they get there. They determine verbal aptitude by means of questions that measure vocabulary and reading comprehension at a relatively high level (32).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress compared the reading abilities of American youth in 1969 and 1974 and found that there was a slight, but not significant, decline in the overall reading achievement of the seventeen-year-olds (31).

Lloyd-Jones and Winterowd (63) compared the NAEP writing data. Their observations on writing by seventeen-year-olds in 1974 include: an overall decline in the quality of the essays written for the second assessment; an increase in awkwardness, run-on sentences, and incoherent paragraphs; the vocabulary was somewhat simple with fewer words longer than four letters than in 1969 essays; and, in general, on the positive side, the mechanics were handled adequately by the majority of the students.

A number of explanations offered by Lloyd-Jones and Winterowd for the declines on the writing assessment include: language is always changing and the scorers may prefer standards that are becoming

outmoded, society provides less motivation for writing because of the presence of telephones and visual communications, and creative writing has been encouraged in the schools more than utilitarian writing (3:89).

Harper and Kilarr (51) point out that the courts have begun to entertain more and more specific charges of inquality and inadequacy in fulfilling established objectives of education. School districts have already been called upon to account for educational malpractice. The classic suit of Peter Doe v. San Francisco Unified School District contended that the school system:

> ...negligently and carelessly failed to use reasonable care in the discharge of its common law duties to provide plaintiff with adequate instruction, guidance, counseling, and supervision...and to exercise that degree of professional skill required of an ordinary prudent educator (1:419).

One of the complaints was that the school district allowed the plaintiff to graduate from high school although he was unable to read above the eighth grade level, as required by the state education code. Shortly after graduation, reading specialists hired by the parents concluded that he had a reading and writing ability of approximately fifth grade level. As a matter of fact, whether for this reason or another, the California legislature changed its minimum standards legislation shortly after Doe brought his suit; school districts no longer must include eighth grade reading ability among their requirements for high school graduation (1:433).

The California Superior Court dismissed the case ruling that for the schools to be guilty of fraud, the diploma had to signify some specific achievement (103).

However, as Strike indicates:

> While the case failed in court, it succeeded in the public forum. It struck terror into the hearts of principals, superintendents, and school boards throughout the country. How many schools after all do not have several Peter Does among their graduates? And it pointed out for all to see that a high school diploma was not a guarantee that its possessor had learned anything in high school (103:94).

Cawalti (20) examines some plausible reasons for the problems of low achievement and motivation among adolescents in the high schools today. Cawalti points out that "we now have the most ambitious undertaking ever conceived by a society." Roughly ninety percent of the age group are in high school, with seventy-six percent graduating. Incentive that once existed is less clear today. Students are aware that they can get into some college somewhere with low marks. There is increasing concern about the likelihood of a job even if a high school diploma is attained (20:86).

Widespread television viewing has probably greatly reduced the ability to read and to take tests well. Bracey (8) suggests that the learning by television can attribute to poor test scores. He notes that much is said about television, but we have not even begun to measure how the number of viewing hours affects values, attitudes, or the way learning "in this audiovisual mode" affects ability to take paper-and-pencil tests (8:550).

The very nature of society has produced a large segment of youths who are severely alienated.

> It seems unlikely that arbitrary requirements of the sort we are seeing among the states will do little more than push the severely alienated youth out of school faster (20:87).

Wynne (117) reviews data which show growing patterns of alienation among adolescents in American society. Statistic rates show

significant increases in youth suicides, drug use, and delinquency between 1950 and 1975. The data simply illustrate the increasing loneliness and "egoism" among the young. In modern schools, a pupil can properly feel that, while he has received a great deal of cognitive information, no one really "knows him" (117:35).

Eichhorn (29) considers the question of American education rejecting the broad implications of the youth culture and returing to a narrow and basic function. The implications that the new youth cultures have for education and what educators may learn from them are important. The speculation raised by the actual status of youth cultures is germane to current national trends and issues. If educators and citizens establish standards without consideration of the youth culture they serve, what will be the result?

> Will the threat of failure result in renewed motivation or will the impact of youth mores negate it? What happens to students who have been kept in school for the benefits of socialization, but who will now, in fair numbers, be sorted out?....The greatest possible academic success for the greatest number of youth must be accomplished without a denial of the critical social, emotional, and moral needs of today's youth (29:502).

Some of the reaons for the public desire to see changes in high school education are evident according to Hart:

> With the decline of family importance and of organizations such as the church, the boy scouts, and other kinds of institutions that have in past generations assumed much responsibility for socialization of young people, we have required the schools to assume too much responsibility. As a result, we have mandated programs, from driver education to sex education, resulting in a proliferation of high school courses. Many important aspects of public school education, such as the basic skills, get deemphasized in relationship to some of these other courses that have more popular appeal (7:94).

Jarrett (58) believes that often the complaint is that with all the fancy courses and methods and emphasis on motivation, the schools are simply not preparing young men and women to find and keep jobs. He suggests that the schools have made "an almost desperate attempt to find ways of making schools relevant to the interests of students" and that a fair amount of the proliferation of courses has been "in the interest of reaching groups long ignored in the schools" (58:236).

An observation by Purves indicates that:

> There are now more students in school for a longer time than there used to be, and as the number goes up, the average may well go down. We can say that our schools get somewhere with nearly everybody, and quite as far as any country in the world with our top students. Few countries have attempted to spread schooling as far as we have, and we have carried it off remarkedly well (92:6).

Public opinion expressed in the annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools during the past four years seems to indicate that there is a crisis of credibility developing between the schools and the public concerning the quality of education. According to the 1976 Gallup Poll (40), fifty-one percent believed that the schools should devote more attention to teaching the basic skills to improve the quality of public school education. Fifty-nine percent of the national total believed that the decline in the national test scores in recent years meant that the quality of education today is declining and that the test scores are correctly assessing the nation. Responses concerning a standard nationwide examination requirement for a high school diploma showed sixty-five percent of the national total in favor of such a test.

The 1978 Gallup Poll (43) reported that sixty-eight percent of the public felt that children should be promoted from grade to grade only

if they pass examinations. Eighty-one percent of the national total felt that students who failed such examinations should be required to take special remedial classes in the subjects they fail. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents believed such tests should be prepared on a local basis, twenty-five percent on a state basis, and twenty-eight percent on a national basis.

Cassidy (17) concludes that all of these trends and events have served to force state boards and departments of education and state legislators to enact legislation or to issue regulations that would attempt to guarantee learning. Whether this guarantee of learning is possible or realistic remains to be seen.

One aspect of the rise in state-mandated testing noted by Fox and Beezer (34) is the public's desire to make the educational system more accountable for student learning. When results of evaluation are available to the public, teachers can be held accountable.

Whether or not demonstrated competency is viewed as crucial in the teaching-learning process will depend, in turn, upon such issues as who defines and evaluates competence, how mastery is defined, the value of a high school diploma in the society, and the number of pupils denied diplomas (65:81).

Pipho observes:

> Very rarely in the history of American education have so many of the people become so interested in the heart of the educational process--questioning what students should learn and how. If the American dream, education for all, is to be achieved, the dialogue on this issue must be open and continuous. The voice of the teacher, the administrator, the school board member, and the parent all need to be part of the debate (86:372).

There appears to be a significant need for the education establishment to be cognizant of what is happening in the area of state

mandates and decisions concerning the basic objectives and philosophies of school programs. Classroom teachers and other professionals in the education field need to be aware of the existing status and meaning of minimum competency testing as they affect the local districts. This study presents a background supporting a need to know what the states are mandating concerning minimal competencies, what the issues and decisions are that may affect the methods and content of teaching, and what the implications of such programs are that may affect the achievement of the student.

In conclusion, the writers previously cited indicate that unanswered questions and lack of research pertinent to the minimal competency testing movement prevent firm conclusions at the present time. Implementation dates for some mandated programs extend into the 1980's. Future research will be needed to tell whether the mandating of minimal competencies has had a significant effect on achievement of students.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to obtain, analyze, and compare findings regarding the state-mandated minimal competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation. More specifically, the purpose is to:

1. Identify specified components of minimal competency testing programs within the limits of the exploratory questions, and

2. Gain information which may provide insight into the place of minimal competency testing programs in the philosophy of education in the United States.

Definition of Terms

The reader may better understand this study if certain terms and definitions are initially clarified.

State-Mandated Policies

State-mandated policies refer to the legislative or state board of education action taken on a statewide basis to require the establishment of minimal standards of competency and the development of testing and evaluation systems in the schools to verify the achievement of students before graduation from high school.

Minimal Competency Testing

Minimal competency testing may be defined as evaluation based on publicly stated criteria and standards that a person must attain to be certified as competent. Students are judged against agreed-upon, preset criteria and standards (15).

Competency

Competency is defined as the ability to perform successfully in the patterned activities which constitute a particular role (100). It is further defined as the proficient application of knowledge and process to a task to meet or surpass the prevailing standards of adequacy for a particular activity (15).

Proficiency

In the literature the terms competency and proficiency are used interchangably. Proficiency is defined as the level of skill development which will give students the ability to function effectively in society (15).

Minimum Competencies

Minimum competencies are defined as the basic proficiencies in skills and knowledge needed to perform in real-life activities (7). In the literature of this study, minimum competencies may refer to successful performance in basic academic skills, survival or life skills, or in life-oriented total learning skills.

Basic Skills

Basic skills are defined as those essential learning skills which are fundamental to other learning in school and to functioning effectively in society. The basic assumption is that if the student can demonstrate such skills in school, he can apply them later in real life situations (10). The basic skills most generally include the skills of reading, writing, and computation. Basic skills are also referred to as basic school skills, basic academic skills, essential learning skills, and classroom skills.

Survival Skills

Survival skills are defined as those contemporary skills or enabling competencies required to meet and cope with everyday life situations. This approach to learning requires a range of basic competencies thought to be essential to an effective adult life (10). Survival skills are also referred to as coping skills, life-role skills, basic life skills, enabling skills, contemporary life skills, and everyday life skills.

Life-Oriented Skills

Life-oriented skills refer to those skills that are associated with competency-based education programs. Competency-based education

is defined as education derived from and organized around an agreed-upon set of competencies and which provides the learning experiences designed to lead to the attainment of those competencies (15). Competency-based education is further defined as the integral functioning teaching-learning system that supports the development of life-oriented skills (60).

Functional Literacy

Literacy is defined as the demonstrated competence in communication skills which enables the individual to function in society (54). Functional literacy is further defined as the ability to read materials needed to perform everyday life and vocational tasks. This usually applies to the performance of such tasks as being able to read newspapers and manuals and to fill out applications.

Performance Objectives

Performance objectives refer to the acceptable levels of achievement for the required skills.

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators refer to those measures defined by the school sytem to be used as proof of the students' skills and knowledge. These indicators are used to determine whether or not the required level of competency has been met for a performance objective.

Limitations of the Study

This study is an exploration of minimal competency requirements for high school graduation in state-mandated programs in operation prior to September 1978. This limitation is necessary due to the

changing status of the development and implementation of the competency programs in the various states. As noted previously, some implementation dates extend into the 1980's. An overview of the state activity shows that some programs are currently under consideration, some programs are being field-tested before final decisions are made, some programs are in the planning stages, some programs are already being revised, and some programs are being completed to meet implementation deadlines. This places a limitation on the availability of specific data.

This study is limited to the competency policies of a representative number of the states with specified high school graduation requirements in effect. Information was gathered from thirty-nine state departments of education in the United States.

Exploratory Questions

The following questions have been constructed to guide the study:

1. Who has the decision-making responsibility for setting standards and assessment procedures for competency programs in each state?

2. What type of skills and skill areas are assessed in each state?

3. What testing instruments or procedures are used for proficiency evaluation in each state?

4. What remedial provisions are made for students who do not pass the tests or achieve mastery of the basic competencies in each state?

5. What provisions are made for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities in each state?

6. What are the traditional requirements for high school graduation in each state?

7. What are the competency requirements and verification for a high school diploma in each state?

8. What differentiated diplomas and certificates of competency are awarded to students in each state?

The answers to the exploratory questions posed in the present study may enable teachers, administrators, and others in the education field to:

1. Better recognize the identifiable characteristics of minimum competency programs.

2. Better understand the role of minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation.

3. Assist those concerned with meeting the needs and problems of schools engaged in competency-based graduation programs to be more effective in planning programs.

Organization of Subsequent Chapters

The content of Chapter I has included a background for the study, the purpose of the study, definition of terms, exploratory questions, and the organization of subsequent chapters.

In Chapter II, a review of the literature related to the study provides an overview of the issues, problems, and opinions specific to minimum competency testing and graduation requirements.

Chapter III contains a description of the procedures used in conducting the study.

Chapter IV contains the presentation and analysis of the data and findings of the study.

Chapter V presents the summary of findings, educational implications, and recommendations for further study based on the findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature related to the topic of state-mandated minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation. Research studies dealing with minimum competency programs are virtually nonexistent at the present time. Therefore, the present review of the literature will concentrate on the current issues and problems inherent in program planning and implementation of competency requirements. A consideration of some relevant factors in establishing minimal competency testing as a distinct issue for further study is presented. Three major areas will be considered:

1. Minimum competency testing policies,
2. Minimum competency testing issues, and
3. Philosophical rationale associated with minimum competency testing programs.

Minimum Competency Testing Policies

The concept of minimum competency testing is identified by a variety of titles and expressions used interchangably in the literature. In the legislative and state board of education mandates, the movement has been called minimum or minimal competency testing, accountability for quality education, minimum achievement level testing, proficiency testing in the basic skills, testing of survival skills, and standards of proficiency to name a few (85). Occasionally these terms are used

to mean slightly different processes, but in most instances differentiation is in name only.

According to Pipho (84, 85, 86), by the end of 1976 sixteen states had taken either legislative or state board of education action toward setting minimum competency standards of some type in their schools. By the end of 1977, the number had increased to thirty-one states. By mid-1978, a total of thirty-three states had some form of action to mandate setting minimum competency standards for secondary school students indicating that the rush to initiate action was slowing down in 1978. The legislators were holding more hearings, reviewing bills in greater detail, and giving more attention to additional studies when needed. In general, all concerned seemed to be more selective about the issues they wished to see incorporated into legislation.

> The minimum competency testing movement is clearly being led, or pushed, by noneducators. While many changes in education have begun externally, the current movement is exceptional in that it has spread so far so fast and because it involves the very heart of the school program. In convincing legislators and state board members of the need for minimum standards, did the public purposely bypass the education establishment? (86:586)

According to Wise (116), many educational policies share common assumptions about schooling:

1. While goals for education are imaginable, society must find a limited set upon which agreement is possible.

2. The goals must be put in a form that will permit assessment of the extent to which they are attained.

3. Tests are then devised to assess performance.

4. Some complexity is added by the realization that some children arrive at school less prepared than others (116:597).

Missing from this set of assumptions about education is reference to the process of education--to how educational practice affects the child. Thus, educational policy is designed to alter the practice of education without an understanding of how education actually occurs.

It appears that as non-educators, some enthusiasts of competency testing are free to focus on the results and to pay little heed to the processes by which they might be achieved (49).

One could argue, says Pipho, that the public call for academic performance standards for high school graduation only mirrors societal problems of which the school is a part; but, nonetheless, parents have issued a clear call (7:9).

The question no longer seems to be whether schools should be involved in minimum competency testing programs, but to what extent and in what ways are the school involved in such programs.

Viewpoints Concerning Minimum Competency Testing

Haney and Madaus (49) in reviewing literature concerning the minimum competency testing movement report that the idea appears to stem from the belief that testing of essential skills and competencies will raise academic standards and increase educational achievement. Students will be guaranteed some minimum amount of learning. However, there is the question about the possibility that these tests could become a powerful influence on what is taught and learned in American Schools if students are denied a high school diploma on the basis of minimum competency examinations (49:463).

Caswell (18) contends that the legal imposition of minimum standards of achievement forces schools to try something that long

experience has demonstrated is literally impossible in an educational system that serves all the children of all the people. It is not as though professional educators have not previously faced the problem of establishing sound goals and tried various solutions.

> The resort by the public to a legal solution grows out of people's frustration, misunderstanding, and ignorance; frustration over low achievement by some students (primarily the dis-advantaged), misunderstaning of the complex problem of developing a desirable level of literacy in a TV-oriented society, and ignorance of the inevitable range of individual differences among students in any unselected group (18:29).

The general public seems to be reacting to the assumption that our children are not learning to read very well. In fact, according to Farr and Tone (32), we appear as a nation to be making vital education decisions on the basis of that assumption. Widespread adoption of minimum competency testing is being made without the advantage of careful analysis of all the relevant data that is available on reading achievement. Decisions should be made on the basis of research rather than unsupported assumptions (32:33).

Members of the South Carolina State Council of the International Reading Association (22) argue that reading teachers and specialists have had little to say in formulating legislation although it affects their professional activities, their schools, and the children with whom they work. They strongly believe that if minimal performance standards are to be set, committees comprised of classroom teachers, curriculum experts, reading specialists, state department consultants in the different content areas, university personnel, and parents should make the decisions. They are opposed to one group or organization making the decisions (22:22).

Tierney (107) advocates a need for standards of competency, but suggests that legislatively mandated minimal competency testing "erroneously assumes" that competencies can be defined for all students, agreed upon by all persons, and measured. Tierney points out that such legislation overlooks the limits and dangers of tests as well as alternative ways of defining and determining student growth. Instead, Tierney states that legislators should be urged to work more closely with educators, parents, and other taxpayers toward an honest examination of the issues involved in educational accountability, testing, the improvement of basic skills, and the improvement of educational experiences for all students (107:11).

The solution to the problems of low achievement are more technical than political posits Wise (116).

> It is true that some teachers do not teach. It is true that some students do not learn. The question is whether high-level policy interventions will solve these problems. I think not. The causes of these problems are deep. They are not likely to respond to the kinds of policy interventions permitted by our current state of knowledge about teaching and learning and policy intervention (116:598).

Three recommendations presented by Wise are: (1) higher levels of government should be concerned with promoting equality of educational opportunities, (2) the establishment of standards and the operation of schools should be the responsibility of the local board of education and its professional staff, and (3) serious research on the problems of poor learning and poor teaching is required (116:598).

The National Council of Teachers of English (76) passed a resolution stating that the NCTE will oppose legislatively-mandated

competency-based testing until such time as it is determined to be socially and educationally beneficial.

> Responsible educators recognize the need for standards of competence in the language arts at all levels....At this time few of the assumptions underlying competency-based programs have been substantiated in practice, theory, or research. In practice competency-based testing overlooks alternative ways to determine student growth and achievement (76:56).

A National Education Association statement indicated:

> The general public and its legislative representatives are asking that educators account for what they are doing. The request is reasonable and the profession has an obligation to answer. The answer cannot be limited to just interpreting the results of student performance...(104:1).

Glass (45) argues that his fields of testing and psychology are incapable of giving any reasonable or safe answers to the questions, "How much must a pupil know to succeed in life?" and "What is the minimum level of proficiency that ought to be required of graduating seniors?" Glass believes that no one knows enough to devise a test of minimal competency, and no one understands enough about the:

> ...political and human forces that would be unleashed if such a hypothetical test were used to certify high school graduates (45:143).

> Such notions treat far too simply the complex interactive and compensatory relationships among tasks and skills. Those who seek to build a system of education on such notions are attempting to build upon a fiction --an antique fiction, tried long ago and wisely cast aside (45:144).

Ebel (28) maintains that the tests of minimum competency do not cause failure nor increase its frequency. They only lead to a recognition of it. Such tests can motivate efforts to learn and efforts to teach by providing specific goals and rewards.

> In sum, minimum competency testing will not cure all the ills of contemporary education, but it will do much to correct one of the most serious of those ailments: it will help to restore concern for the cognitive development of young people to highest priority in the mission of the school. It will motivate teachers to teach more purposefully and students to work harder to learn (28:549).

Moreover, Fremer (38) notes that the move to set minimum standards for high school school students can be a positive step. The teachers and students need to know what the standards are and how they are determined. The positive aspects of such tests and standards are that students with major deficiencies can be identified and such deficiencies can be corrected.

Much controversy exists concerning minimum competency testing. More specific aspects of the benefits and problems of such testing are discussed at a later point in this chapter.

National Competency Testing

Educators have opposed the idea of national testing because they see it as an unnecessary intrusion of the federal government into what the states and local districts have always controlled. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development determined to oppose national testing and cautioned that if an official national test was available, virtually all the local school districts would be under extraordinary pressure to administer it (15).

Joseph Califano, Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (76) states that the control of the curriculum in the United States has always rested with the states and local districts, not with Washington. The federal government should support, but not direct, efforts at the local level. Califano noted that basic competency tests

are useful and necessary when used skillfully and sensitively. However, he rejected the idea of any mandatory or voluntary national tests or national standards (76:56).

Advocates of strong national scholastic standards include Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, who presented a proposal for a formal system of national tests based on such standards.

> The standards should consist of specific minimum competency requirements for various levels....In addition there should be a formal system of tests to show not only the relative standing of students and schools against national norms, but also whether students meet the minimum competency requirements....The creation of national scholastic standards is the minimum step we must take....The impetus must come from Congress to see that national standards are set (93:56).

In 1977, Congressman Ron Mottl introduced a bill to create a National Commission on Basic Education which would be responsible for developing a series of national proficiency tests in reading, writing, and mathematics. After critical reactions to the bill, Mottl redrafted it with voluntary rather than mandatory standards and tests for the states and school districts to use (75).

Federal Bill HR15 was passed in July 1978. The bill provides for the voluntary program of minimal competency testing and remedial courses. It does not specify certain minimum standards, nor require that certain tests be used. Adopting minimal standards is not to be a condition of receipt of federal aid; the program is to be completely voluntary. Mottl notes:

> The federal government will be in partnership with the states and local school districts in reemphasizing the importance of the basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic....Choices are best left to the states and districts. The proper role of the federal government is a very limited one...to provide funds, technical assistance, and informtion to the states to aid them in developing such program (69:3).

Further research will be necessary to determine the influence this program, although voluntary, will have on the education programs of state and local districts.

High School Diploma Requirements

Criticism of the performance of schools has resulted in mandating competency requirements for high school graduation in several states. This trend toward requiring skill mastery for graduation is a change from the past when the completion of a certain number of courses and sufficient attendance were generally the only requirements. Essentially, now the school may be held responsible not only for the teaching but also the learning (17).

Elford (30) states that the introduction of a competency-based high school graduation requirement introduces a shift in the way in which educational decisions are made. Since the advent of the Carnegie unit, high schools have awarded diplomas based on process criteria and "private teacher judgments" in a sufficient number of courses. Now, the student would also have to pass the competency test (30:4).

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Task Force on Graduation Requirements (74), a great diversity exists among the states in their high school graduation requirements. Some states legislate specific courses as requisites for the diploma. In some states, local school districts determine all the qualifications for graduation. The most typical approach seems to be that some requirements are mandated by the state, and some are decided by local districts.

The introduction of performance requirements raises the question of state and local control in regard to the skill or subject areas covered by the requirements. Elford (30) identifies a few options: the state specifies the basic skills areas and allows the local districts to set mastery levels, the state requires a specific level of performance on state-approved measures in specified areas, the state decides the whole question is a local issue, or the state establishes its own required test and passing score. An advantage of the statewide approach is that it would restore meaning for the entire state and allow for student movability within the state. One of the complaints against state-developed proficiency requirements is that the standard-setting prerogatives of the local districts and faculties are ursurped and, thus, does not allow for the consideration of the unique needs of each community.

The NASSP task force observed graduation requirements as reflecting specified content and processes as well as defined approaches to evaluation. The following conditions were considered important: (1) the benefit of experience must be maintained as part of education and should encompass the personal growth and development of the student, (2) the number of units of credit should be sufficient to ensure a thorough education, (3) attendance in educational settings is an important component of learning for youth. Group learning assists students to communicate, to work together, to gain perspective, and to accept responsibility. (4) Competency measures should focus upon fundamental skills necessary to the acquisition of more specific skills (74:10).

> The world into which youth graduate, that of employers and of institutions of higher education, is not looking

> for cognitive and psychomotor proficiency alone. This world is also seeking social qualities such as maturity, dependability, and the ability to work constructively in a group setting. The realms of experience and achievement, then, are important to the value of the high school diploma (74:7).

The Task Force recommends that the criteria for the high school diploma should be as follows:

> As verified by units and credits:
> a. Successful completion of credits or units equal to a regular student course load,
> b. Sufficient attendance in courses and programs to gain fully the educational and social benefits of group situation (74:10).
>
> As verified by competency measures:
> a. Functional literacy in reading, writing, and speaking,
> b. Ability to compute...,
> c. Knowledge of the history and culture of the United States, including the concepts and processes of democratic governance (74:9).

Hawkins (52) reviews the NASSP proposal for redefining the diploma that would eliminate the traditional single diploma concept and develop several certificates of achievement. The proposal would create three basic graduation certificates: the standard diploma with endorsements for academic or vocational achievement, certificates of basic competencies, and certificates of attendance. Hawkins states that the value of this proposal seems to be that it takes into account the diversity among students. Elford (30) notes that in the attempt to motivate the able student, some have proposed the different types of diplomas based on the various levels of proficiency achieved by the students. This requirement has been found to be objectionable by many because of its elitist connotations.

Ainsworth (2) suggests that the one important breakthrough that competency requirements have achieved is the focus of student

performance on achievement rather than on the accumulation of class hours of instruction.

The current move to broaden and to individualize secondary education has brought new public attention to the question of educational alternatives. The NASSP reports that some schools are planning and developing alternative paths to the high school diploma. The new approaches for students will require an opening of educational opportunities both on campus and in the community. Among the alternative formats available are work experiences, volunteer services, special career programs, courses at post-secondary institutions, work-study programs, and apprenticeships. While offering these opportunities to learn, they must, at the same time, be meshed with graduation requirements (74:12).

If the competency movement is to provide realistic opportunity for all students to attain the high school diploma, it must be accompanied by an instructional program that will offer a variety of ways to achieve success. The alternative, according to Keefe and Georgiades, is to retain the current, closed instructional model which furnishes few opportunities for personalized motivation and attention (60:108).

Spady concurs that:

> Essentially, the more closely outcome goals reflect competencies that require problem solving, personal initiative, and social skills in connection with life-roles that are broader than those of student, worker, or consumer, the greater the need to expand the instructional program beyond the walls of the school...(100:11).

Minimum Competency Testing Issues

The literature concerning minimum competency testing programs, issues, and policies poses more questions than research and data can answer at the present time. An examination of several authors reveals a

similar analysis of issues associated with establishing minimum competency standards.

Elford (30) presents some of the principal questions raised concerning high school graduation requirements:

1. Should teacher judgment be supplemented by specific external performance criteria in awarding diplomas?

2. Should high school graduation requirements in part be based on "real life" skills as opposed to academic skills and knowledge?

3. Who has the final responsibility to determine the specific requirements for graduation--the faculty, the school board, or the state department of education?

4. Should special needs students be exempted from minimum requirements or awarded special diplomas?

5. Should external requirements be imposed that might prevent a substantial number of students from receiving a diploma in a given high school?

Pipho (84, 85, 86) has compiled an extensive list of questions pertinent to minimal standards. Some of the questions are:

1. Who should determine what the minimal skills should be?

2. Should high school graduation be based solely on the achievement of basic skills or are course requirements and teacher opinion equally important?

3. Should minimal standards be set at the local, state, or national level?

4. Will schools test academic achievement with ordinary achievement tests, or will they use applied performance tests?

5. What part should teacher opinion and judgment play in determining which students have met the minimum standards?

6. What happens to students who do not achieve a minimal standard and continue to fail?

7. Must competence by displayed in the English language?

A composite list of questions indicates the intense concern about establishing minimum standards shown by educators. Glass (45), Haney and Madaus (49), Keefe and Georgiades (60), Purves (91), Strike (103), and Yesner (118) offer some crucial questions which await competency program planners.

1. Do we know, psychologically, at what levels desirable tasks should be mastered?

2. Do we know what a person needs to know or be able to do in order to be able to participate at a minimum level in a democratic society?

3. Can we agree about the kinds and levels of literacy to be expected of all people, and on the methods by which that literacy should be achieved?

4. Can we determine which minimum essentials will be necessary when, and for what purpose?

5. Are competency-based standards fair and legal?

6. Will the emphasis on practical competencies mean the erosion of liberal education?

7. Will the focus on measurable outcomes lead to a neglect of outcomes that are difficult to measure?

8. How will you gain a balance between cognitive and affective?

9. What educational programs will be needed to support a workable approach to the competency requirements?

10. How will proposed remedial programs change the grouping patterns in the school programs?

As cited previously, competency measures pose more questions than can be answered at the present time, if at all.

Brickell (10) presents a discussion guide for examining key questions concerning formulating an effective minimum competency testing policy:

1. What competencies will you require?

2. How will you measure them?

3. When will you measure them?

4. How many minimums will you set?

5. How high will you set the minimums?

6. Will the minimums be set for the school or for the student?

7. What will you do about the incompetent?

Minimum Competencies

Butler (15) states that there is almost always an immediate and universal lack of agreement among educators as to what constitutes competence and how to describe it.

> Among supporters and skeptics alike, presumptions about competence-based programs are confused because of the many different views concerning the meaning of the word competence itself. To some, competence is seen as the as the application of knowledge; to others, it is knowledge and skill combined; still others maintain that knowledge and skills constitute separate competences. Some equate competences with behavioral objectives; others see competences more global and general in concept. Some hold that a competence, like a behavioral objective, demands a very specific set of knowledge; while others state that competences address only broad process skills that are essentially content and knowledge free. Some claim that only directly measurable performance comprises competence, while others maintain that unexpected and unmeasurable learning outcomes are included in the concepts of competence (15:7).

Haney and Madaus (49:465) relate that a fundamental issue in the minimum competency movement is whether to assess competencies that will be needed later in life or restrict testing to the more traditional school skills, on the assumption that they have some relationship to success beyond school. The "language" of competency testing suggests concern not with the broader goals of education, but more narrowly with the issue of skill acquisition.

Spady and Mitchell (102) state that the simplist proposals call for a renewed emphasis on skills purporting to guarantee that high school graduates will possess demonstrated potential for success in the job market.

> Competency-based education advocates share two major convictions: first, that the capabilities of too many high school graduates are inadequate to meet the requirements of life in modern societies; and, second, that schools must assure that useful and relevant student performance levels are achieved by establishing definite standards for student certification (102:10).

Spady defines competency-based education as a performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate the demonstration of known, explictly stated, and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life-roles (100:10). Spady recognizes that the implementation of a complete conception of a competency-based program would be difficult and finds that it is no surprise that almost all the state efforts in competency development appear limited in scope and conception.

> During the past five years, a major ground swell of policy action has emerged in over thirty states imposing some kind of competency demonstration as a condition for student promotion or graduation. In all but a few cases, what has come to be called competency-based is no more than a testing and remediation program focused on basic literacy and mathematical skills. It misses the point in terms of the meaning and importance of competency in life-role activities (100:16).

Davis (25) reports that several studies suggest a need for a functional literacy curriculum. It is anticipated that sometime in the near future many states will require students to pass a literacy test in order to be granted a diploma attesting to academic success. There is a need for a functional literacy skills curriculum for those individuals who find the present curriculum does not meet their needs. A

thorough analysis of the school curriculum is necessary to find where life-related skills will benefit the students (25:53).

Slater and Nafziger (99) point out that in recent years education has been faced with mounting pressure to document what students can do as a result of their schooling. Furthermore, this "doing" is often couched in terms of practical adult skills--as opposed to the traditional academic skills that schools have been designed to develop.

> The lay public, wanting convincing proof that educational dollars are being well spent, is now asking for concrete evidence that graduating students can apply the basic skills in everyday situations. Recasting the outcomes of schooling...increases the need for new curriculum development, and the need to train teachers to think in terms of the "practical" (99:1).

According to Wise, the goals that are receiving current attention view education instrumentally--"not as an end in itself but as a preparation for life, especially for the world of work" (115:356). The schools are to develop the basic skills at the minimal level necessary to function effectively in society. The goal of schooling is "reduced to the instrumental value of providing just enough reading and arithmetic to get by as an adult" (115:358).

> The major deficiency of testing for policy purposes is that it deals with the results of education and not with the workings of education....Policy makers now prefer goals which appear attainable and which are measurable....In the drive to make educational institutions accountable, goals become narrow, selective, and minimalist (115:356).

Fischer and Klein (33) challenge the idea that the competencies needed by citizens in a complex global society and a pluralistic democracy can ever be adequately identified, defined, and predicted. To base learning outcomes entirely upon what is observable and measurable

is to "deny the complexity and unpredictability" of the educational process (33:390).

Haney and Madaus report that there is little scientific basis to support the idea that we know what the important skills are, and the tests that presume to assess these competencies cannot withstand serious scrutiny of their ability to predict competency in life skills, survival, or functioning (49:467).

Elford (30) suggests that the emphasis on lifeskills represents an emphasis on the socio-economic purposes of schooling. As a side benefit, the movement toward life skill assessment might call forth from the liberal arts proponents a clearer formulation of the "real life" value of a liberal education at the high school level. Elford states that as competency requirements increase the focus on basic skills, the following questions become urgent:

> Does the liberal arts approach, which seeks to open many doors and include a wide range of worthwhile experiences, unduly distract less proficient students from the acquisition of basic skills? Should "education" for these students be limited, for all practical purposes, to the acquisition of these basic skills? On the other hand, can students who lack these basic skills in reading and computation profitably take part in a broader ranging liberal arts program? (30:6)

Testing Procedures

The forms of tests are of central concern since how an area is measured and assessed may seriously influence how an area is taught. Attention appears to be centered upon the use of paper-and-pencil tests and applied performance testing (70). Many of the cognitive competencies for graduation will involve application of basic literacy to real life situations. According to Madaus and Airasian (65), these

competencies are most validly measured by the most direct means possible. However, when the number of individuals to be tested is large, indirect measurement must be substituted as illustrated by the indirect attempts to measure skills through the use of objective multiple-choice tests (65:86).

The method of test development needs to be determined. The domain-referenced test, composed of questions which represent a sampling of the outcomes or objectives in a particular area, is useful in assessing general performance levels of individuals or groups. The objectives-referenced test has each question related to a specific outcome the student is expected to achieve. It is useful in diagnosing individual student weaknesses and prescribing necessary remediation.

The debate over the form of minimal competency tests has centered largely on the norm versus criterion references (70). Norm-referenced tests indicate how well a student is doing in comparison to the norm group. Criterion-referenced tests are designed to tell whether an individual can perform acceptably when compared to a pre-established standard.

The most valid measures will show that the student can actually perform them. Applied performance testing measures performance on tasks requiring the application of learning in an actual or simulated setting. Slater and Nafziger state that given the growing demand for assessment of school outcomes that are necessary for competent performance in jobs and other non-academic situations, applied performance testing can supplement traditional measures of scholastic achievement (99:1).

Grade Equivalent Achievement Levels

Exit competencies are defined in terms of grade level designation in some states. Wubben (88) points out that at any age there is a large gap in the achievement of students; and that at grade twelve, the gap may be a possible performance range of eight years. Based on the knowledge of the variability that exists in student abilities, if the acceptable performance level is set low enough so that all the students in the normal school population who work hard can graduate from high school, the bottom line is about sixth grade competencies for the low student. As the level is raised significantly, we will be denying diplomas to large numbers of students. Wubben considers three questions concerning acceptable levels of performance: (1) can the present existing variability of students be reduced to the point where students at the low end of the scale rise several grade levels above their expectancy? (2) will competency standards be set so low that all students in the normal range can reasonably be expected to graduate? and (3) will high school graduation be limited to a smaller proportion of students? The attempt to have the diploma "mean something" will result in either about a seventh grade competency level or an elitist secondary school. Wubben suggests that educators should concentrate their efforts on finding where children are in their achievement and educational development and teach them the best way to go as far as they can (88).

Haney and Madaus (49) warn about the serious consequence of setting a minimum standard at a particular level. If a minimum level of twelfth-grade equivalent performance were required, around fifty percent of the twelfth graders could be expected to fail--simply because of the norm-referenced nature of grade equivalent scores. Standards

that are established on a common-sense basis frequently result in a considerably higher than expected proportion of students failing to meet them (49:468).

> In New York state, when ninth-grade equivalent achievement was proposed as an appropriate minimum level to be required for high school graduation, one official (apparently without any understanding of grade equivalent scores) responded, "What happened to the twelfth grade?" (49:468)

The current basic competency tests in New York are set at the fifth grade reading level. Calling the tests "absurdly easy," the Board of Regents formally adopted in March 1979, "tougher" tests for the students graduating in 1981. The new tests, which have a tenth-grade reading level, have been described by a state department official as "the toughest in the country" (13).

Nathan and Jennings report that in Connecticut, a local school board, planning to establish a seventh-grade reading level as a minimum condition for high school graduation, was criticized by members of the community. "We're paying for twelve years of schooling, but we're only getting seven years" (72:624).

Harper and Kilaar (51) maintain that the lack of understanding of the meaning of grade equivalent scores is a major basis for the false notion that there is a reading level for each grade. They point out that there is an urgent need to clarify the complexity of learning to read and reading instruction for those responsible for public policy decisions:

> The simple solution to mandate by legislation or court judgment at what level everyone should read will not suffice....What is needed is not more shallow legislation and court decisions, but an attempt at clarification of what we are about in reading education (51:919).

Low Achievement Concerns

Keefe and Georgiades state that competency measures will be meaningless to skill-deficient students who enter high school four or five grades below the "grade level" in the basic skills (60:108).

Elford (30) notes that the requirement of demonstrated competence in basic skills might discourage some students who are deficient in basic skils but, nevertheless, value the school experience and the acquisition of the diploma for other than academic reasons. These students might size up their chances on the test and decide to drop out of school, figuring what they could not learn so far in school, they cannot learn now (30:9).

As for the literacy tests, Burton states that it won't take long for influential laymen to wake up to the fact that some young people will never get past the fifth or sixth grade achievement level and that their education is not upward progress, but horizontal enrichment (14:5).

What we still haven't faced successfully on a large scale, according to Foshay, is the fact that the bottom twenty percent of the population, expressed as poor achievers in school, deserve to be educated and require special treatment (36:616).

Tyler summarizes the situation:

> In the past the schools sorted their students, giving failing grades to those who had difficulty in learning and encouraging those who learned easily. And while most of the other students went on to graduate from high school, those who received low grades soon dropped out and found jobs requiring little education. This practice is no longer acceptable in a technological nation. Those who drop out are largely unemployed and live on welfare funds. Hence, young people are urged to stay in school, and the school is expected to find ways of teaching those who do not respond to traditional educational practices. This is a new task for American schools, and most of them need assistance in learning

> how to effectively teach children who in the past have not learned easily (9:2).

Remedial Programs and Implications

The availability of well thought-out remediation efforts on a broad scale will be crucial in determining whether minimum competency testing programs really help to improve education (49).

Pinkney and Fisher (83) state that the real key to success will depend upon effective programs of remediation.

> Quite often in the past, the results of such compesatory education programs have failed to produce valid evidence of progress. Students too often have spent large blocks of time in remedial programs that were ineffective and boring. Research reflects that the "track record" of many well-financed and highly publicized remedial programs were at best very poor. Some educators have even placed all the blame upon the children--or their respective cultures--for their own lack of knowledge as to how to effectively remediate children (83:55).

Following the same line of thought, Keefe and Georgiades (60) believe that schools will feel constrained to organize a variety of remedial learning programs for students who have diagnosed deficiencies.

> Compensatory efforts in many schools today are appendages to the regular operation. They are understaffed, underplanned, partial in focus, and often unsuccessful. They offer a bandaid when a major operation is necessary (60:101).

Perhaps the schools may be able to concentrate their efforts and resources now where they are the most needed and will do the most good.

Primary concern is centered upon the student involved in the remedial process. Van Til (108) asks those questions which "beneath the jargon and the slogans" remain unanswered:

1. Will failing students be cut off from the rest of the student body?

2. Will there be an effort to encourage failing students to stay in school?

3. Are there efforts to retrain teachers to administer remedial help more effectively?

4. Will remedial programs drain teachers and money from regular school programs?

5. Does the test reflect cultural bias?

6. Will remedial programs in some schools result in a rigid "tracking" system that effectively resegregates students within the walls of the school?

7. Can the student be expected to come up to passing levels in a short time?

8. Can the student be helped without uprooting her or him from the regular school program?

9. Will the student drop out of school?

10. Can the student compete for a job without a regular diploma? (108:557)

> We should not forget that behind the blue and white forms, the educational jargon, the percentages, and the political schenanigans are the students judged functionally illiterate. They are not numbers or holes in a computer card. They are young people whose future should be our first concern (108:557).

Many states require that remedial or intervention courses be offered so that students who do not attain the minimum competencies or who are in danger of not graduating from high school will receive the assistance necessary to attain achievement levels. Myers contends that:

> If the education profession does not begin now to define the needs for remedial instruction, these remedial or intervention courses may only condemn many students to repeated failure. The legislators must turn to the profession for a definition of these standards, and it is the obligation of the profession to provide it (70:2).

Potential Positive Outcomes of Minimal Competency Programs

Cawalti (20) examines several potential benefits that can be derived from establishing competencies as a basis for promotion or high school graduation: (1) it appears to be useful to focus the resources of a school district on a clear set of goals, (2) it may afford the opportunity to reexamine the nature of general education for all secondary school students for the first time in many years, and (3) it may encourage educators to define that which is "basic" and that all American youngsters should receive (20:91).

Taylor (88) states that the competency movement may force educators to more clearly identify what they're trying to do in respect to high school graduation. Educators will also need to do a better job of identifying just what the problems are and to take more careful corrective kinds of action. There may be greater stress on efforts with slower learners and on alternative modes of meeting goals.

Keefe and Georgiades (60) state that some major advantages of a competency-based approach to the high school disploma include: first, it encourages a needs assessment of local community priorities and a clear definition of what should be basic to the curriculum; secondly, the graduate will have demonstrated a number of basic competencies and would be expected to function successfully in these areas; and the schools will have to produce useful diagnostic testing early in the grades so that remedial instruction can be programmed (60:101)

Madaus and Airasian note that the specification and evaluation of graduation competencies can lead to the broadening of graduation competencies to include skills and competencies previously neglected or treated only informally. There is the likelihood of the general

public's being better aware of the pupil competencies implied by a high school diploma (65:84).

Taylor (105) examines the issues raised by the competency-based high school graduation examination legislation and states that it is predictable that the political pressures accompanying the accountability movement and the competency movement will result in more stress's being placed on individual promotion standards. The difficulties produced by this legislation will accentuate the need to give individual differences greater recognition in all instruction and evaluation plans (105:26).

Potential Problems in Competency Programs

Madaus and Airasian (65) point out that the most prevalent danger of any competency- or objective-based certification system is the tendency to focus upon the starting and ending points of instruction with insufficient concern for the process of education.

> Once the ends have been operationally defined, focus shifts to methods of evaluating whether students have attained the ends. Too often, the instructional activities which are at the heart of the educative process...are taken for granted. It is assumed that the state of the art is such that we are able to teach most youngsters whatever we wish to teach... (65:81)
>
> In such programs, not misconstruing the state of the art in instruction and curriculum is critical, because through the explicit statement and publication of minimal competencies in the cognitive, social, and career domains, schools have gone on record as implying that they can, in fact, teach these competencies (65:82).

Purves (91) states that the implications of the competency movement are not entirely clear and raise many potential problems:

1. Possibility that statements of competence will lead to a circumscribing of the curriculum to a point where it will be merely preparing students for a test rather than educating them broadly.

2. Possibility that statements of competence will lead to didactic teaching for improving student performance when research has indicated such teaching is not as beneficial as more varied approaches to teaching.

3. Possibility that educational resources will be concentrated upon those students who have trouble attaining the minimal level of competence and be diverted from broad range of students who need to go beyond it.

4. Possibility that measures of competence will make the schools less responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity.

5. Possibility that scores on competency tests will determine promotion and thus lead to a return to grade retention when research has pointed out the negative effects of such retention (91:1).

Madaus and Airsian (65) state that too much emphasis on the competencies and their evaluation can subvert traditional instruction and replace it with a narrowly focused "teach for the test" orientation.

> The maxim that teachers and pupils prepare for the examination and evaluations that have the most import is particularly true in the context where certification standards and contents are determined by an agency external to the school (65:85).

Where there is a choice between emphasizing tested or non-tested objectives, it is general experience that the objectives actually tested assume primacy.

Gilman (44) discusses that tests may not measure the learning of complex concepts adequately and may completely ignore the learning of attitudes and values. Combs (62) states that the problem of learning always involves two aspects: providing information or experience and the individual's personal discovery of the meaning of the information for him.

> Many of our current problems of alienation and depersonalization arise directly from our terrible absorbtion in the information half of the learning equation (62:45).

Madaus and Airasian (65) state that "schools within schools" may begin to appear with pupils grouped in terms of whether they represent the majority of students likely to be certified competent, or those for whom minimum competencies are predicted to be a problem. The schools may help these students by providing the additional help and tutoring that they need to attain competency, but at the same time it may "stigmatize these students by singling them out" to meet the criteria that their peers find all too simple (65:89).

The legal implications of minimum competency testing portend a new generation of legal issues over the practices and malpractices of the schools. Harper and Kilarr (51) review the legislative activity and court cases. They state that as legislatures have established and redefined, with greater specificity, the exact outcomes of the educational process, the courts have begun to entertain more and more specific charges of inequality and inadequacy in fulfilling these established objectives (51:913).

Strike suggests that the problem of identifying minimal competencies should be addressed by asking what kinds of knowledge and skills are of such import that the state has a right to apply coercion (denial of diploma) in order to get someone to acquire them (103:94). Madaus and Airasian ask how far a state or school district can go in mandating particular social or attitudinal competencies without violating an individual's freedom of choice (65:80). Wilson states that to apply minimal standards to attitudinal problems goes against "the basic philosophical tenets of a free society," and to require that a person has the "proper attitude" implies both doctrinization and an invasion of privacy (7:30).

McClung (64) states that tests may be legally vulnerable if they measure knowledge or skills never taught in the schools, if a disproportionate number of minorities fail the tests, if an adequate phase-in period is not provided, and if mandatory personal and social behaviors are involved that infringe on the individual's freedom of choice. McClung warns that a school system that cannot assure the curricular and instructional validity of its competency tests should not use them as a basis for denying promotion or a diploma to any of its students (64:398).

Haney and Madaus (49) report that major problems appear to rise from the relationship between what the tests measure and what is actually taught in the schools.

> This relationship, or lack of it, deserves considerably more attention that it has received so far. If the relationship is weak, the tests are unfair; if it is strong, it may be because what is tested affects what is taught. Competency testing schemes may have important unintended consequences, both for students and for the substance of what gets taught in school. The most sensible antidote to such side-effects is to devote more attention to what should be taught in the schools and how to teach it effectively and less to what can conveniently be measured (49:481).

Purvis stresses that the focus of attention should be on what it is that we expect of our schools to provide every student instead of what an individual must do to survive in a complex society (75:3).

"The issues of import are not measurement problems, but problems of goals, objectives and values" (65:89). Madaus and Airsaian clarify four of these issues:

> Firstly, given the lack of instructional research clearly indicating the appropriate methods of teaching attitudinal and value-oriented competencies, it would appear better, initially, to focus attention upon basic literacy

> and numeracy competencies while gathering evidence about the potential of explicitly including affective, personal, social, and career development competencies among evaluated performances.
> Secondly, standards of certification must be clearly articulated.
> Thirdly, if diagnosis, prescription, and certification are to be viable, meaningful processes, much time will, of necessity, need to be devoted to evaluation.
> Finally, the individual student and his competence, feelings and life chances assume the focal point in such plans (65:89).

Philosophical Rationale

According to Morshead (68) two major ideologies, the liberal and conservative traditions, have determined, in part, the direction school policy has taken in American education.

The main tenet of educational liberalism is the belief that schooling must be rooted in the experiences of the student. Schools are viewed as places where learning, curiosity, and interest have a value of their own.

> Those who follow the liberal tradition, then, are humanists who believe that by addressing themselves to the quality of life children experience in school, they can affect the quality of life of children after leaving school (68:16).

The purpose of schooling, according to the conservative tradition, is intellectual and moral training. It is the teacher's task to direct the child in his efforts to master the subject matter.

> Each task a child masters is a preparation for something beyond itself. All of schooling, in fact, prepares the youngster to take his place in the adult world...by its nature, the conservative outlook in education more easily lends itself to the accountability movement... (68:17).

Hosford explains that there are "two giant forces" in education in our country today--the first driving toward accountability and the

second toward a humaneness in education. Both systems have much to offer all in the profession of education (56:52).

Behaviorism and humanism are defined as two theoretical approaches for dealing with human events.

> To accomplish its goals our educational system must achieve both behavioral and humanistic objectives or fail us all--society, parents and students alike (56:56).

Combs states that the clearly defined behavioral approaches will help solve some of the objectives of education; others call for humanistic thinking if they are to be efficiently achieved.

> Behavioral approaches alone are simply inadequate to deal effectively with the broader humanistic objectives required to live effectively in a complex modern society (56:56).

Petty (77) states that the primary basis of all education is and ought to be the development of attitudes, values, and behaviors which show respect for other persons and our environment.

> Teachers, thus, must first of all, be promoters of humaneness, of the enjoyment inherent in learning, of rationale thinking. Without these basics, little of value will come from learning others (77:614).

According to Forshay (36), the acquisition of skills of knowledge does not offer an adequate base for living a life. The skills of social interaction, emotional growth, physical awareness, aesthetic awareness, and spiritual response are all equally essential for coping with life.

> Leave out any of these skills and the ability of a person to cope with life is severely--even perilously--reduced....Coping skills embrace all the significant aspects of what it is to be a human being (36:618).

Forshay believes that if the school restricts itself to its intellectual functions, leaving other aspects of development to chance, it "misportrays the human condition and tells a lie about existence" (36:623).

> The vision of a school we all share, I believe, is a place full of life, where people act with purpose on their own. The present back to basics movement in its narrow focus on a few of the coping skills, moves us away from such an ideal. What we need is a recognition of what is, in fact, basic to gaining an education and living a life (36:624).

Cousins (23) believes that education is being measured:

> ...more by the size of the benefits the individual can extract from society than by the extent to which the individual can come into possession of his or her own powers (23:15).

He states that the emphasis on "practicalities" is being characterized by the "subordination" of the liberal arts.

> The irony of the emphasis being placed on careers is that nothing is more valuable for anyone who has had a professional or vocational education than to be able to deal with abstractions or complexities, or to feel comfortable with subleties of thought or language, or to think sequentially....(23:15).

> The humanities would be expendable only if human beings didn't have to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others, if the human past never existed or had nothing to tell us about the present, if thought processes were irrelevant to the achievement of purpose, if creativity was beyond the human mind and had nothing to do with the joy of living, if human relationships were random aspects of life,....(23:15).

Cousins observes that there would be good reason "to eliminate the humanities if a free society were not absolutely dependent on a functioning citizenry (23:15)."

Organ (80) notes that education for the whole child recognizes the dynamic nature of the human organism. Man is not only rational; he is

also emotional. His emotions are manifested in his attempt to fulfill a need, an urge, a want, or a desire.

> To avoid those aspects of the educative process which provides the student the opportunity to identify personal needs, suggest goals, and engage in self-evaluation, is to ignore the non-intellectual facets of the human experience (80:39).

The advocating solely of the development of rational powers or cognitive abilities with a concentration exclusively upon knowledge acquisition will deprive students of other dimensions for adequate living. Hansen maintains that "students educated only in cognitive abilities are prepared only to be acted upon rather than to create or initiate" (80:539). He feels that there is a need to establish objectives that will assist youth to find their identities, to establish their goals and values, and to implement the processes to achieve these objectives. "The schools must permit and encourage individuality and independence" (80:538).

Glasser (47) more than adequately expresses the basic premise and importance of the dignity of the individual in our classroom:

> All of us, no matter who we are, have this basic need to identify ourselves as somebody, as a separate, unique, distinct human being--our self-image, our self-concept, whatever you want to call it. There is nothing complicated about this. It's me in distinction to you, and you in distinction to me. From the time we are born until the time we die, we struggle to gain and maintain for ourselves this feeling as an identified person. We are somebody (47:11).

In summary, Cawalti observes that:

> ...we must remember that education should be a liberating experience for all--helping students to achieve their fullest potential and to relate in a humane way to all persons with whom they have contact (20:91).

Summary

Criticism of the performance of schools and students has resulted in mandating minimum competency testing requirements for high school graduation in several states. The possibility that these tests will become a powerful influence on what is taught and learned in American schools is questioned--particularly if students are denied diplomas on the basis of minimum competency examinations. Although the value of competency standards may be questioned, it appears clear that they represent an educational reality, and educators at all levels will have to cope with developing programs in the best possible manner. The problem no longer seems to be whether schools should be involved in minimum competency testing, but to what extent and in what ways are the schools involved in such programs.

The literature concerning competency programs, issues, and policies poses more questions than research and data can answer at the present time. There are no simple solutions.

The philosophical reationale indicates two conflicting forces which influence the minimum competency programs--the first driving toward accountability and the second toward a humaneness in education. Schools will need to examine their philosophical justification for employing a teaching-learning approach in order to deal effectively with the current competency issues.

In summary, Haney and Madaus observe that:

> ...what remains to be seen is the influence the minimum competency testing movement will have on the lives and the learning of the children themselves (49:477).

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study has been undertaken to investigate specified components of the minimum competency testing requirements for high school graduation in the states across the country. The study is designed to examine and report the findings of this investigation. The procedures for conducting the study are outlined in this chapter.

Procedures for Conducting the Study

A letter was sent to each of the fifty state departments of education in the United States concerning the development of minimum competency testing programs for high school graduation in each respective regional area of the country. Information about state-mandated competency programs and testing in the school systems within each state was requested. State department officials were asked to include current observations and dialogue that they considered pertinent to the issue.

Thirty-nine state department offices responded to the letter. In general, responses were received from the officials dealing directly with the minimum competency programs--the offices of research and planning, assessment and evaluation, educational accountability, research and program evaluation, to name a few.

Data included statements and observations about individual programs, education code and legislative policy action publications,

technical assistance guides for implementation of legislation, basic skills program manuals, curriculum assessment manuals, and other information publications of the state departments.

Examination of the literature from the several states provided factual information to support the existence of the rapid and widespread development of basic skills programs mandated by the states. Literature indicated that a majority of states have taken some form of competency standards action. The legislation and policy action covers a broad range from requiring the establishment of general statewide goals and educational standards to specified detailed implementation of explicit programs.

The patterns in the several states indicated that the investigation was best illustrated by a representative sample drawn from the total reply. A case study of selected states with intensive programs selected according to certain criteria was considered an effective approach to provide the most useful current picture of the secondary school competency movement.

In order to select the representative sample of states, the following criteria were used:

1. States that have specified mandated minimum competency requirements for high school graduation,

2. States that have implementation dates established for graduation requirements to be effective,

3. States that have basic skills and minimum standards' programs in operation at the present time, and

4. States for which an availability of information provided sufficient data for comparison as specified in the exploratory questions.

Of the thirty-nine states which replied, fourteen have mandated high school competency requirements to be effective with specified graduating classes. These are: Arizona (1976); Florida and New York (1979); Alabama, California, New Mexico, Vermont, and Virginia (1981); Idaho, Maryland, Nevada, and Tennessee (1982); and Georgia (1983). These states were considered for the sample.

Next, the following states were excluded from the sample: Alabama, Nevada, Virginia, and Tennessee. They are in the test development stage of program development and, therefore, do not have programs in operation. Maryland is currently developing a competency-based program. Georgia is field-testing pilot programs at the present time throughout the state. Programs are in operation in Arizona and Idaho; however, insufficient data prohibited inclusion.

The criteria established for the sample for the purpose of describing and comparing the competency programs were met by the states of California, Florida, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Vermont.

The representative sample of states provides, in addition, a geographic cross-section of what is happening across the nation. The regional areas of the Northeast (New York and Vermont), the Southeast (Florida), the Southwest (New Mexico and California), and the Northwest (Oregon) are represented. The Midwest and Central regional areas do not have states with mandated competency high school graduation requirements at the present time.

A summary of the key responses of the thirty-two states not included in the representative sample is included in the appendix section of this study.

Analysis of the Findings

Specific exploratory questions were designed to organize findings related to the major topic. The following outline was employed to examine the findings gathered from each state concerning:

1. the decision-making responsibility for setting standards and assessment procedures for competency programs,
2. the type of skills and skill areas to be assessed,
3. the testing instruments or procedures for the proficiency evaluation,
4. the remedial provisions for students who do not pass the tests or achieve mastery of the basic competencies,
5. provisions for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities,
6. the traditional requirements for high school graduation,
7. the competency requirements and verification for a high school diploma, and
8. differentiated diplomas and certificates of competency.

Specific findings concerning each question were systematically recorded in summary form for each representative state. Using this information, the findings from all the states for each specific question were compared. Finally, conclusions were stated based on the findings for each question.

Summary

This chapter contains a description of the procedures involved in conducting the study. Information from the state departments of education provided data to identify specific components of state-mandated minimum competency programs and requirements for graduation as specified by the exploratory questions. The findings are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings collected in this study. The exploratory questions are presented in the order they appeared in Chapter I. Findings relevant to each question are presented following the question.

Exploratory Question 1

Who has the decision-making resonsibility for setting standards and assessment procedures for competency programs in each state?

Oregon

The State Board of Education adopted new requirements for graduation in 1976, based on minimum competencies. The State Board delegated the authority and responsibility for competency development to the local school districts. The local school districts identify the minimum competencies and performance indicators used for competency verification that the schools and the community are willing to accept as evidence students are equipped to function in the society in which they live. This is an on-going process.

Oregon does not have state-adopted mandated minimum competencies, nor measures of such. The State Department of Education has prepared guidelines to help local districts develop and implement the graduation requirement programs.

California

The State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 3408 (1976), which mandated high school proficiency requirements, and AB65 (1977), which extended the requirements to the elementary schools. The legislation placed the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education in the roles of providing guidance and technical assistance to the local districts. The law does not authorize the State Board of Education to adopt statewide minimum standards for graduation. The State Department of Education was required to provide a framework for assessing pupil proficiencies to every school district by February 1978. The framework was to include a range of assessment items solely to assist each local district.

The decision-making authority was assigned to each local school district. They are required to establish district proficiency standards in reading, writing, and computation; to design a basic skills assessment program; and to develop assessment procedures to measure student proficiency attainment. The legislature stated that in developing standards, the district governing bodies should involve both the schools and the community in the process. Emphasis is on the active involvement of parents broadly reflective of the socio-economic composition of the district, teachers, administrators, counselors, and students in high school districts.

New Mexico

The State Board of Education (1976) appointed a Basic Skills Task Force to develop a statewide plan for improving the teaching and learning of basic skills in New Mexico. The Task Force identified an

initial listing of basic life competencies. State Department content area specialists, in consultation with local school personnel, generated the listing of basic skills necessary to attain each life competency and constructed basic skills sequences. Statewide testing included a required proficiency examination matched to the identified life competencies chosen by the Task Force. The State Board of Education approved the Basic Skills Plan in April 1977.

Local districts were required to develop plans for processes to determine where instruction of the identified skills takes place, to establish one or more checkpoints for assessing competencies, and to develop instruments for the evaluation of competencies at the checkpoints. The State Department of Education developed curriculum planning guides to assist the local districts.

Florida

The Educational Accountability Act, 1976, enacted by the State Legislature, directed the State Department of Education to develop minimum student performance standards in the basic skills and in functional literacy at the high school level. State level curriculum specialists worked with district level teachers, administrators, and citizens in task force meetings to validate the standards. Minimum Student Performance Standards were adopted in April 1977, by the State Board of Education.

The local districts are required by law to use the prescribed state minimum student performance standards and to develop their own standards to exceed the minimums. The State Department of Education was directed to provide technical assistance upon request.

The State Department of Education is responsible for determining attainment of the basic skills' standards through a state-developed and state-administered assessment program.

Vermont

The State Board of Education accepted the Basic Competency Program in July 1976, for implementation in the schools beginning September 1977. Curriculum consultants in the State Department of Education compiled lists of objectives suggested by educators, parents, businessmen, and citizens thoroughout Vermont. In all regions of the state, open meetings for teachers were held at which the competencies were discussed and revised. Pupils at all grade levels took part in field testing of these competencies.

Instruction and assessment will be done with materials and procedures developed at the local district level. Teachers are required by the State Board to maintain for each Vermont pupil a Progress Record on which the mastery of the Basic Competencies will be recorded. An official Pupil Progress Record is provided by the State. The State Department of Education provides guidelines and consultative services to assist local districts and teachers.

New York

The Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York governs education in the state. All actions on developing minimum competency examinations have been taken by the Board of Regents, not by the legislature. In May 1976, the Board of Regents approved the resolution establishing the passing of basic competency tests as a requirement for receipt of a high school diploma.

The State Department of Education developed and prepared the tests and has the responsibility for monitoring the basic competency movement. The Department provides test advisory and consulting services.

Summary for Question 1

The state legislature enacted high school proficiency requirements in California (1976) and Florida (1976). Competency programs were mandated by state board of education policy actions in Oregon (1972, revised 1976), New Mexico (1976), and Vermont (1976). The Board of Regents adopted requirements in New York (1976). High school graduation requirements are mandated at the state level in all the representative states.

Basic competencies or minimum standards are developed at the state level in Florida, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont. The state delegates the responsibility for establishing minimum competencies to the local school districts in Oregon and California. More basic competencies or performance standards are developed at the state level than at the local school district level.

Competency testing instruments are developed and administered at the state level in Florida, New Mexico, and New York. Assessment measures and procedures are developed by the local school districts in California, Oregon, and Vermont. There is an equal proportion of state-developed and administered testing instruments and locally-developed assessment measures.

State task forces comprised of educators and citizens compiled basic competencies and performance standards in Florida, New Mexico, and Vermont. Community involvement was required in setting minimum

standards for locally-developed programs in California and Oregon. State and local decisions concerning minimum competencies and performance standards involved community input by educators and citizens at large.

Technical assistance and consultative services are provided by all state departments of education. State guidelines and frameworks to help local districts develop programs are required in California, New Mexico, Oregon, and Vermont. Technical assistance is provided by all state departments of education. State guidelines are to be provided for all locally developed programs.

Exploratory Question 2

What are the subject areas and the skills areas to be assessed in each state?

Oregon

Students must be certified as possessing application-type competencies to read, write, speak, listen, analyze, and compute. Additional competency areas will be required of the graduating class of 1981. Competency is defined within Oregon as a "statement of desired student performance representing demonstrable ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and skills assumed to contribute to success in life-role functions." Oregon competencies are not just knowledges, skills, and understandings; but the application of these in the life roles of individual, learner, producer, citizen, consumer, and family member.

California

Legislation requires proficiency standards which allow a pupil to function effectively in contemporary society, including, but not limited to, reading comprehension, writing, and computation skills. The basic skills are defined to mean the standards, in the English language, necessary for success in school and life experiences.

School districts must arrive at their own concept of basic skills and specify processes and skills essential to the basic areas: (1) district may choose a minimum level which requires students to demonstrate basic "building block" skills leading to future development of basic skills, (2) district may choose a level which requires students to demonstrate proficiency in basic skills equal to that of an adult performing a life-role task, and (3) some districts may decide to move toward a competency-based education program.

New Mexico

The State Board ruling requires basic life competencies within a general framework of reading, writing, and mathematics. There should be an initial set of basic life competencies with a subsequent grouping of basic instructional skills necessary to accomplish each competency. Basic life competencies are defined to mean those skills required to meet or cope with those common situations faced by almost every individual. Coping skills such as the ability to write legible sentences were felt important daily life situations.

Florida

Legislation requires the mastery of minimum standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students must demonstrate ability to

successfully apply the basic skills to everyday life situations, to apply skills to problems and tasks of a practical nature as encountered in everyday life.

Vermont

The State Board policy requires a set of approved Basic Competencies in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematics, and reasoning necessary to enable further learning and social functioning. Basic competencies are defined to mean "skills the mastery of which is required for the attainment of functional literacy." Functional literacy connotes a level of achievement which allows one to function in society.

New York

New York requires basic competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics. Basic competencies are defined as a minimal set of basic skills used by most adults at some time in their lives.

Summary for Question 2

All of the representative states require basic skills and competencies necessary for coping in everyday life situations and fundamental to further learning. Application of the basic competencies in life-role functions is required in Oregon.

All of the representative states require mastery of competencies in reading, writing, and computational skills. Speaking and listening skills are required in Oregon and Vermont; analyzing skills are required in Oregon.

Exploratory Question 3

What testing instruments and procedures are used for proficiency evaluation in each state?

Oregon

Measurement procedures typically utilize teacher judgment and not formal written competency tests. The teacher uses judgmental and observational data as well as typical classroom testing procedures to evaluate the achievement of each student.

The local district should identify the courses where competency verification and any related instruction would be most appropriate. Not all high school courses in grades 7-12 would be involved.

The set of competencies should be a sampling of student skills limited to those which the local community could support as acceptable evidence of basic minimum abilities. The local district has the option to select the level of generality of the specified competencies.

California

Legislation requires the assessment, on a prescribed basis, of the performance of students once in grades 7-9 and twice in grades 10-11. Once a student has met the standards up to the prescribed level for graduation, his or her progress need not be reassessed.

There is no state-administered competency test. Assessment procedures include typical classroom tests, structured observations, work samples, test instruments used to gather data, and applied performance testing designed to measure proficiencies in the most direct manner. The assessment results must be usable for preparing an appropriate instructional program for each individual student. The standards must be

written so as to facilitate assessment of individual achievement and progress in mastering the basic skills. Pupil progress records should identify status of student in attaining the required competency mastery.

The enroute assessment of the basic skills may be administered in the student's native langauge, as well as in English. However, the final assessment of the proficiencies must be in the English language.

Some districts choose to construct their own assessment instruments, some districts choose to select assessment instruments from among available sources, and districts choose assessment based on "pools" of validated items which are matched to test specifications prepared by the district. The law requires each local district to design a basic skills assessment program for its high schools.

New Mexico

Students are required to take a statewide paper-and-pencil proficiency test in grade 10. The measurement instrument is a high school version of the Adult Performance Level Program customed-developed for use in New Mexico in combination with an assessment of student writing. The APL Program was chosen as the proficiency measure that best suited the requirements of the state. The examination was matched to the identified life competencies previously chosen by the New Mexico Basic Skills Task Force and outlined by the State Department.

The New Mexico High School Proficiency Examination is a criterion-referenced functional literacy test designed to indicate the proficiency of young adults in the skill and content areas demonstrated to be relevant to functioning with success in society.

Florida

Legislation establishes grade 11 as the time for the assessment of the mastery of minimum performance standards as well as functional literacy. The Basic Skills Test is an objective-referenced test. Students are assessed on selected communication and mathematics skills which identify some of the minimal competencies which all Florida students should acquire in order to perform the reading, writing, and mathematics tasks needed in everyday life.

In addition to the basic skills test, eleventh graders are tested on their ability to apply the basic skills to solve practical problems in real world situations. The Functional Literacy Test is a criterion-referenced test consisting of 117 items which cover twenty-four skills in mathematics and communication. The test is a written on the seventh-grade level. The passing score is set at seventy percent.

Passing of all the standards in the Basic Skills Test and the Functional Literacy Test is required for high school graduation. Both tests are developed and administered by the State Department of Education.

Vermont

The method for deciding whether or not a pupil has achieved functional literacy shall be determined locally. Instruction and assessment will be accomplished with materials and procedures developed at the local level.

Teachers are required to maintain a pupil progress record for each student on which the progress and mastery of the basic competencies is recorded on a continuous basis from the primary grades through high school. The local district may use the Pupil Progress Record forms

provided by the State, or it may develop its own progress record which must be approved by the State.

The basic competencies are not related directly to any grade level. Mastery indicates a level of achievement which allows the student to perform competency without review, assistance, and errors in excess of those indicated in the competency statement. A few basic competencies could be mastered in the early grades, but most of the competencies will be introduced, practiced, tested, and reviewed at various stages throughout the curriculum.

Materials for assessing mastery should be determined systemwide to provide for comparable materials for all students. The materials for assessing the progress toward mastery can be determined by each grade level.

The State Board of Education has adopted eight basic competencies in reading, eight in writing, seven in speaking, three in listening, and twenty-five in mathematics. Fifteen basic competencies in reasoning are in the preparation stage.

New York

Students are required to take a statewide paper-and-pencil criterion-referenced test designed to measure the minimum skills and capabilities that adults must have in order to function adequately in modern society. Students will take the test starting in grade nine. Once a test has been passed, the student need not take that test again. The tests are compulsory for graduation.

The basic competency tests are written on a fifth grade reading level. The passing score is set at sixty-five percent. The tests

are offered only in the English language. However, in March, 1979, the Board of Regents did vote to allow non-English-speaking students who enter the state's schools after the eighth grade to take some parts of the tests in their native languages.

A new series of tests has been approved to be effective with the class of 1981.

Summary for Question 3

Statewide criterion-referenced paper-and-pencil competency tests are administered in New York (grade 9), New Mexico (grade 10), and Florida (grade 11).

The passing scores on two state tests are sixty-five and seventy percent. The reading grade levels on two of the state tests are fifth and seventh grade.

Local districts design their own assessment measures and procedures, with emphasis on individual student achievement, in Oregon, California, and Vermont. Assessment takes place in California once in grades 7-9, twice in grades 10-11; in Oregon at appropriate points during grades 7-12; and in Vermont on a continuous K-12 basis.

Final assessment must be accomplished in the English language in California and New York.

In summary, half of the representative states administer state-developed criterion-referenced paper-and-pencil tests between grades nine and eleven. Some state tests are designated at the fifth and seventh grade levels; some passing scores are set at sixty-five and seventy percent. Half of the representative states design their own means for determining individual student progress and mastery of skills

at various points at the secondary level, and, in one case, on a K-12 continuum. The final assessment must be in the English language in two of the representative states.

Exploratory Question 4

What remedial provisions are made for students who do not pass the tests or achieve mastery of the basic competencies in each state?

Oregon

State Board policy places the responsibility on the local school districts to provide the necessary instruction for those who need it. If any competencies are not demonstrated, those that are not should be identified with recommendations for further work.

California

Districts shall provide appropriate instruction in basic skills for those students who do not demonstrate sufficient progress toward mastery of basic skills. Instruction shall continue until the pupil has been given numerous opportunities to achieve mastery. School principals must hold conferences with each student who does not demonstrate sufficient progress toward basic skills mastery, and a meeting must be held with the secondary school student and parents to discuss the results of the testing and to recommend actions to further the student's progress.

No State funds will be provided except for costs incurred in notifying parents of the need to meet to discuss the students' progress or the need for additional instruction.

New Mexico

Remediation is defined as the special instruction for students who fail to pass the basic skills testing program. This special instruction must have the purpose of teaching the students those basic skills in which they are deficient so they can pass subsequent testing. It must seek to reteach basic skills students failed to learn during the regular courses of instruction.

Districts may choose to develop a separate remedial program, or may opt for the instruction of deficient students through individualized techniques in the regular program. The local districts must develop plans for remediation for those students who fail at each checkpoint and for those who fail the grade ten proficiency examination. Retention of students will not constitute an adequate plan for remediation.

The remedial program was to be incorporated into the total plan for basic skills that had to be submitted to the State Department of Education.

Florida

Remediation is the responsibility of the local district. The district is required to plan and implement a remedial program for students so identified. If a student fails any of the grade eleven Basic Skills Tests, remediation must be provided by the local district, which will have the responsibility of certifying when the standards have been met after the remedial instruction. The district will have the option of requiring the student to retake the grade eleven Basic Skills Tests the next year. If a student fails the Functional Literacy Test, remediation

must be provided by the district, and the student will be required to retake the test as a senior.

State lawmakers did authorize the Florida Compensatory Education Act in 1976 to provide supplemental funds to each district to be used for the sole purpose of providing direct remedial instruction to those students enrolled in the K-12 program who have need of special education assistance.

Vermont

Provision must be made for remedial work for pupils who have not achieved mastery, and for the determination of pupils who will need special multi-year plans.

Teachers in all the grades should develop comparable materials at lower levels of difficulty so that students who have not achieved mastery will have continued practice in developing their ability to meet the competencies at the functional literacy level. Provision is to be made to identify pupils having difficulty in attaining and maintaining mastery of the basic skills. Records of such pupils will include ways in which each school district has provided analysis of the learner and the learning situation and provided programs based on the needs.

New York

The remedial programs are the responsibility of each local school system.

Summary for Question 4

Necessary remedial provisions for those students who do not demonstrate sufficient progress toward mastery of basic competencies is the

responsibility of local school districts in all the representative states. Remediation procedures are required in the policy actions of Oregon, California, New Mexico, Florida, and Vermont.

Remediation is defined as special instruction for those who fail the statewide testing so they can pass the subsequent testing in New Mexico and Florida. Remediation is on a continuous basis for individuals who need instruction and opportunities to achieve mastery in basic skills in California, Oregon, and Vermont.

In summary, remedial provisions for students to attain mastery of the basic competencies is the responsibility of the local school districts. In some states, remediation is defined as special instruction for those failing the state assessment tests so that they can pass subsequent tests. Remediation is viewed as a continuous process for individuals who need instruction and opportunities to achieve mastery in only half of the representative states.

Exploratory Question 5

What provisions are made for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities in each state?

Oregon

Oregon does have a state assessment program which conducts fourth, seventh, and eleventh grade assessments in reading, writing, and computing. However, according to the Oregon State Department, this does not constitute an assessment of competencies. Individual growth is monitored on a continuing basis.

California

Legislation requires local assessment of pupil progress toward proficiency in the basic skills in reading, writing, and computation beginning in the 1978-79 school year for high schools and in the 1979-80 school year for the elementary grades. Assessment of student progress must be conducted at least once during grades 4-6, once in grades 7-9, and twice in grades 10-11. The purpose is to ensure early identification of pupils lacking competence in basic skills, so that such pupils can receive appropriate assistance to achieve mastery of such skills prior to high school graduation. Students should be able to meet prescribed standards upon exiting from sixth, eighth, and twelfth grades.

New Mexico

Local school districts, beginning in 1977-78, were required to develop plans for the establishment of one or more appropriate checkpoints between kindergarten and grade nine to serve as the basis for determining whether or not students were acquiring those skills in reading, writing, and mathematics that will enable them to demonstrate the required competencies at grade ten.

Florida

The uniform statewide basic skills assessment program will serve to screen students as to their attainment of the state minimum standards in grades three, five, eight, and eleven. The basic skills tests will measure the appropriate skills in reading, writing, and mathematics agreed upon by educators as minimal for the grade level tested.

Particular emphasis will be placed upon the pupil's mastery of basic skills before he or she is promoted from grades three, five, eight, and eleven. This program eliminates the concept of social promotion.

Vermont

The Basic Competency Program applies to all public schools, kindergarten through grade twelve. Continuous recorded progress for each student allows for a constant monitoring of the achievement and deficiencies of each student in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and computing.

New York

The Pupil Evaluation Plan is a testing program required of all pupils in grades three and six in the public and non-public schools in New York. The tests are standardized reading and mathematics tests developed and administered by the State Department of Education and based on the New York courses of study in the schools. The purpose of the tests is to identify and locate priority groups of low-achieving pupils in need of compensatory education. Special financial aid is allocated to school districts according to the number of students scoring below fixed average range.

Summary for Question 5

Legislation requires local assessment for early identification of deficient skills in pupil progress toward proficiency in Oregon (district option), California (at least once during grades four-six), New Mexico (one or more checkpoints between kindergarten and grade nine), and Vermont (continuous monitoring in grades K-12).

Uniform statewide basic skills assessment programs exist in Florida (grades three, five, eight) and New York (grades three and six).

Assessment in all the states is in the basic areas of reading, writing, and computational skills, with the exception of writing skills in New York. Oregon and Vermont also assess speaking and listening skills.

Emphasis will be placed upon pupil mastery of basic skills before grade promotion decisions are made in California (grades six and eight) and Florida (grades three, five, and eight).

In summary, a majority of states require local assessment for early identification of deficient skills in pupil's progress toward proficiency. Uniform statewide assessment programs exist in two of the states. Early assessment is in reading, writing, and computational skills. Two states also require speaking and listening skills. Emphasis is placed upon grade promotion in two states.

Exploratory Question 6

What are the traditional requirements for high school graduation in each state?

Oregon

The local board awards a diploma upon fulfillment of all state and local district credit, competency, and attendance requirements.

The State Board requires a minimum of twenty-one course credits for graduation to include study in language arts/English (3), social science/history (1), citizenship/government (1), health education (1), physical education (1), science (1), mathematics (1), comsumer education/personal finance/economics (1), career education (1), and electives

(10). Twelve school years of planned educational experiences are required, except as local boards adopt policies providing early or delayed completion of all state and local program, credit, and performance requirements.

Local boards may adopt policies to allow credit by examination, off-campus experiences, independent study, work experience, correspondence courses, and others.

California

Local boards of education develop a prescribed course of study to include the state requirements. State mandates that sufficient proficiency must be shown in English, American history, American government, mathematics, science, physical education, and such other subjects as may be prescribed.

State legislation directs that the local board, with the active involvement of parents, administrators, teachers, and students at the secondary level, shall adopt alternate means for students to complete prescribed courses of study. These may include practical demonstration of skills, work experience, outside-school experience, interdisciplinary study, independent study, and credit earned at a post-secondary institution and others.

New Mexico

Satisfactory completion of a series of course offerings in English (4), social studies (2), mathematics (1), science (1), physical education (1) and selected electives (9) is required. Credit may be allowed by examination for off-campus experiences or from approved correspondence schools.

Florida

Each school district establishes standards for graduation from its schools which include a minimum number of academic credits in English (2), social studies (2), mathematics (1), science (1), physical education (1), and electives (15). Alternate plans for graduation include course work at a post-secondary institution, job entry programs, and special student performance plans developed by each district.

Vermont

Graduation requirements include the satisfactory completion of sixteen one-year courses or their equivalents in units. Credits are earned in English (4), social studies (2), mathematics (1), science (1), and electives (8). Possible learning experiences include, but are not limited to, independent study, work study, community internships, and field work programs. Requirements include any others as the local district may establish.

New York

Students may follow a course of study leading to a local diploma or a state regent's diploma. The regent's diploma is awarded to students who follow a prescribed state course of study; the diploma recognizes high scholastic achievement. Local district diplomas are earned by students who choose to follow the regular course of study. Courses are required in English (4), social studies (3), science (1), physical education/health education (4), and electives (4).

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Summary for Question 6

Graduation requirements include the completion of specified numbers of course credits in all the representative states. Courses are prescribed by the local districts to include both state and local requirements.

Alternate means for students to complete prescribed courses of study are provided to some degree in all the representative states. Alternative plans for graduation may include off-campus experiences, independent study, credit earned at a post-secondary institution, field work and others.

Exploratory Question 7

What are the competency requirements and verification for a high school diploma in each state?

Oregon

Students are expected to demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and skills assumed to contribute to functioning effectively in the life-roles of citizen, learner, consumer, individual, producer, and family member. The graduating class of 1978 must be certified as possessing application-type competencies to read, write, speak, listen, analyze, and compute. Beginning not later than the graduating class of 1981, the schools must also certify attainment of the competencies to use scientific and technological processes; develop and maintain a healthy mind and body; be an informed citizen in the community, state, and nation; be an informed citizen in interaction with environment; be an informed citizen on streets and highways; be an

informed consumer of goods and services; and function within an occupation or continue education leading to a career.

Each district is required to specify and measure its particular graduation competencies. The local board will issue a diploma upon fulfillment of competency, credit and attendance requirements. Student transcripts must record satisfactory demonstration of minimum competencies.

California

Subsequent to June 1980, local school districts may not issue a diploma unless the student has met the district-prescribed standards of proficiency. School proficiency progress records must show that the student has met the basic skills and proficiency standards in English necessary to success in school and life experiences.

New Mexico

Students must demonstrate the ability in skills and content areas which are relevant to functioning in adult society as measured in grade ten by a proficiency examination and a writing assessment administered by the state. Beginning with the graduating class of 1981, all diplomas will contain an explanatory note stating that students are required to take a high school proficiency examination. If the student has satisfactorily completed the examination a "statement of competency" is noted on the diploma. The statements of competency certification on the diploma will assist in assuring that the diploma reflects competency in certain basic skills. If the student does not pass the examination, the diploma will still contain the explanatory note, without the competency certification. Student transcripts will also reflect

statements regarding the students' progress on the high school proficiency examination.

Florida

Effective with the class of 1979, each school board shall establish standards for graduation to include the mastery of minimum performance standards as demonstrated in the statewide eleventh grade assessment. Passage of the basic skills tests and the Functional Literacy Test is required for graduation and the receipt of the standard diploma.

Vermont

The Board of Education has stipulated that the mastery of all of the state-accepted Basic Competencies will be one of the requirements for graduation from high school starting with the class of 1981. The awarding of a diploma shall indicate that the student has attained achievement of functional literacy in the enabling skills areas as specified by the State Board policy and recorded on the continuous pupil progress record.

New York

All students in the class of 1979, including those who are handicapped, must pass all the basic competency tests to earn a diploma. Special education students may be excused from taking the tests, but it will not be possible to waive the diploma requirement.

Summary for Question 7

State policies mandate some form of competency testing as one requirement for high school graduation in Oregon (1978), New York (1979),

Florida (1979), California (1981), New Mexico (1981), and Vermont (1981).

Standard diplomas will be awarded to students achieving locally prescribed mastery of basic skills and proficiency standards in Oregon, California, and Vermont.

Students must pass state competency examinations in New York and Florida to earn a standard diploma. In New Mexico, standard diplomas are awarded to all students meeting course requirements. A "statement of competency" will be noted on the diplomas of those students who pass the proficiency examination.

In summary, all of the representative states have some form of competency testing as one requirement for high school graduation. Students must pass a state competency examination in half of the states and meet locally prescribed standards of proficiency in the other representative states.

Exploratory Question 8

What differentiated diplomas and certificates of competency are awarded to students in each state?

Oregon

Local school districts have the authority to grant certificates of compentency to those students who do not meet all the requirements for graduation and who have chosen to terminate formal schooling. Certificates of competency will identify the minimum competencies required for graduation which the students have acquired during their school careers.

Districts have the option to award certificates to all students in addition to the diploma so that the students will have records of their

acquired competencies when seeking employment or pursuing further formal education.

School districts are required by law to award handicapped students documents certifying successful completion of program requirements. Diplomas serve as such documents. Oregon law requires that districts, when awarding diplomas to students completing a special education program, must not modify the diploma to differentiate the special program requirements from those of the regular school program. Rather, any such differentiation should be identified on the students' transcripts of record.

California

Legislation allows school districts to establish differential standards for those students with diagnosed learning disabilities.

Diplomas may not be differentiated on the basis of the student's intellectual or mental capacities.

No existing provision of the law expressly precludes the board of any school district from conferring a certificate of completion in lieu of a high school diploma upon any pupil who has completed the district's prescribed course of study, but who has failed to meet the standards of proficiency in basic skills established by the district.

New Mexico

Students receiving diplomas with statements of competency will have demonstrated that they have mastered the minimal competencies specified by the state plan.

Students who are unable to demonstrate proficiency in the minimum competencies will receive a regular high school diploma signifying

completion of required course work, without a statement of competency. Special education participants will recieve consideration based on individual circumstances. Special education participants should have the opportunity to take the proficiency examination if they so desire.

Florida

A student who meets all requirements prescribed by the State Board shall receive a standard diploma; or the Board may, in lieu of the standard diploma, award differentiated diplomas to those exceeding the prescribed minimums.

A student who completes the minimum number of credits and other requirements, but is unable to meet the minimum performance standards in basic skills, shall be awarded a certificate of completion in a form prescribed by the State Board.

Special high school students with identified handicaps or disabilities will not be required to meet all the requirements and shall be awarded a special diploma. This does not prevent a student who meets all the requirements from qualifying for a standard diploma; nothing in the legislation limits the right of an exceptional student solely to a special diploma. Any such student shall be afforded the opportunity, upon request, to fully meet all the requirements of a standard diploma.

The State Board shall make provisions for the appropriate modification of testing instruments and procedures for students with identified handicaps or disabilities, in order to ensure the results of the testing represent the student's achievement, rather than the student's impaired process skills.

District school boards may provide for certificates of attendance and for differentiated diplomas reflecting varying competencies of the students.

Vermont

Students who have a limiting handicap for whom individual plans are developed in accordance with PL94-142 will receive a standard diploma.

Pupils with limiting handicaps which prevent them from meeting the specific local graduation requirements or meeting some specific basic competency will have a component included in their individual plans explaining the exception to the requirement and any alternative requirement designed for the pupil.

New York

The Board of Regents prohibits school districts from issuing certificates of achievement or substitute diplomas to normal students who do not pass the basic competency tests.

Students may choose to take a course of study leading to the regent's diploma which signifies high achievement. It is not required.

Summary for Question 8

Certificates of competency may be awarded by local districts to students who do not meet all the competency requirements for graduation in Oregon, California, and Florida. No certificates of competency or achievement or substitute diploma may be issued in New York.

Diplomas awarded to handicapped or learning disabled students may be modified to indicate the special program in Oregon, California, and

Vermont. Special diplomas are awarded to handicapped students in Florida.

In summary, half of the representative states award certificates of competency to students who do not meet all the competency requirements for graduation. One state prohibits the use of certificates of achievement. Standard diplomas are awarded to handicapped students in half of the states; one state issues a special diploma.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine data regarding state-mandated minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation. A primary function of the research investigation was an examination of the specified components of these programs within the limits of the exploratory questions.

Comparisons of existing legislative and state board directives were made in order to provide some descriptive evidence of the components of these programs. The answers to the questions in the study may enable educators to better understand the directions in which the states are moving and the growing influence that these testing programs will have on education in the United States.

Chapter V will summarize the study and discuss the findings. Recommendations for further study will be presented.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes the summary of the study, the summary of the findings, a discussion of educational implications, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to: (1) identify specified components of minimum competency testing programs as a requirement for high school graduation, and (2) gain information which may provide some philosophical insight into the place of minimum competency testing in education in the United States.

The following questions form the basis of the study:

1. Who has the decision-making responsibility for setting standards and assessment procedures for competency programs in each state?

2. What type of skills and skill areas are to be assessed in each state?

3. What testing instruments or procedures are used for proficiency evaluation in each state?

4. What remedial provisions are made for students who do not pass the tests or achieve mastery of the basic competencies in each state?

5. What provisions are made for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities in each state?

6. What are the traditional requirements for high school graduation in each state?

7. What are the competency requirements and verification for a high school diploma in each state?

8. What differentiated diplomas and certificates of competency are awarded to students in each state?

Related literature relevant to the problem was presented. Particular emphasis was placed upon the philosophical aspects of minimum competency testing policies and issues. Journals and expert opinion concerning competency requirements for high school graduation were reviewed.

The design of the study presented a description of the procedures for conducting the study. Information from state departments of education provided data to identify specific components of the state-mandated minimum competency testing requirements for graduation.

The findings of the study were based upon the exploratory questions of the study. A summary of the findings is included in this chapter. Educational implications are discussed and recommendations for further study are presented.

Summary of Findings

Findings on Practice

A case study of six selected states with intensive operational programs selected according to certain criteria was considered an effective approach to providing the most useful current picture of the secondary school competency movement for graduation. Findings relevant to each exploratory question are presented question by question.

1. The decision making responsibilities for setting standards and assessment procedures for competency programs in the states include:

a. high school competency requirements are mandated at the state level in six states.

b. basic competencies and minimum performance standards are decided upon and developed at the state level in four states and at the local level in two states.

c. state-developed competency testing is administered in three states.

d. locally-developed assessment measures are administered in three states.

e. decisions concerning minimum competencies and standards have involved input by the community, educators and other citizens in five states.

f. technical assistance for competency programs is provided to local systems by the six states.

g. state guidelines are provided for locally-developed programs in four states.

2. The type of skills and skill areas assessed in the states include:

a. basic competencies necessary for coping in everyday adult life as well as skills fundamental to further learning are required by six states.

b. the demonstrated ability to apply the skills assumed necessary for coping in life-role skills is required in one state.

c. competency in the areas of reading, writing, and computational skills is required in six states. The skills of listening and speaking are also required in two states.

3. The testing instruments or procedures for proficiency evaluation in the states include:

a. statewide competency tests are administered for grades 9-11 in three states.

b. local assessment procedures based on individual student mastery of skills at various points in secondary school are required in three states.

c. state tests are designated at the seventh grade level in one state and at the fifth grade level in one state.

d. passing scores are set at sixty-five percent in one state and at seventy percent in one state.

e. final assessment of competencies must be accomplished in the English language in two states.

f. special assessment provisions for learning disabled students are stated in policy action in four states.

4. Remedial provisions for students who do not pass the tests or achieve mastery of basic competencies include:

   a. remedial provisions for students to attain mastery of basic competencies is the responsibility of local school districts in six states.

   b. remediation is viewed as a continuous process for individuals who need instruction and opportunities to achieve mastery in three states.

5. The provisions for early identification of problems of deficient skills and abilities include:

   a. local assessment for early identification of deficient skills in pupils' progress toward proficiency is required in four states.

   b. uniform statewide assessment programs in the elementary grades exists in two states.

   c. emphasis is placed on early assessment in reading, writing, and computational skills in six states.

   d. decisions concerning promotion between specified grade levels are based on assessment results in two states.

6. Traditional requirements for high school graduation include:

   a. completion of a specified number of prescribed course credits is required in six states.

   b. high school graduation requirements include both local and state requirements in six states.

   c. alternate means for students to complete credit courses in off-campus experiences are approved to some degree in six states.

7. The competency requirements and verification for a high school diploma include:

a. state policies mandate some form of competency testing as one requirement for graduation in six states.

b. students must pass a statewide competency test to receive a diploma in two states.

c. students must pass a statewide proficiency test to receive a "statement of competency" stamped on the diploma in one state.

d. students must achieve locally-prescribed mastery of basic skills and competency standards to receive a standard diploma in three states.

8. Differentiated diplomas and certificates of competency that are granted to students who do not meet all the competency requirements for graduation include:

a. certificates of competency are awarded in three states.

b. certificates of competency are prohibited in one state.

c. standard diplomas are awarded to handicapped students who complete special education programs in three states.

d. special diplomas for the handicapped are awarded in one state.

Philosophical Concerns

At this point the investigator will go beyond the findings and consider implications beyond the study. The reader may accept or reject the statements according to his or her own experience and philosophical stance.

The review of the literature supported the premise that philosophical aspects of minimum competency testing are a crucial concern for education today. Although the technical and political aspects of minimum competency testing must be dealt with, attention, however, must

also be centered on the effects that these testing programs will have on the lives of the children.

The following philosophical concerns were considered relevant to the competency programs by the investigator.

Variability of student achievement was discussed in the review of literature. By implication, some students on the bottom line of the ability scale will not, in all reality, be able to achieve past a sixth or seventh grade ability level. If the minimum is set much higher than sixth grade ability, the number is reduced who can attain the minimum performance level and who will be capable of earning a diploma. Therefore, schools should be cognizant of the variability and base decisions concerning student performance on relevant research evidence instead of assumptions about educational ability.

In addition, students differ in motivation and maturity, as well as family backgrounds. This must be realistically taken into account and evaluation programs will need to accomodate all levels and differences.

A foremost problem is the mandating of a single test to measure all students at the same time on specified skill attainment. The results of such testing for all students can result in a segment of the school population's being labeled incompetent. Much of the pressure of tests will fall to a sub-population comprised of students of economically disadvantaged and non-English-speaking families, students from culturally-different and minority groups, and students, in general, with inadequate experiential backgrounds.

Minimum comptency testing may result in special remedial classes, possible grade retentions, and the dropping-out of individual students.

A positive step is to focus attention on creating ways that are effective in dealing with the skill-deficient child. This implies a need to find the areas where the student is mentally and emotionally equipped to learn. Most, if not all, students must have a reasonable and realistic opportunity to achieve a level of minimum competency. As Glasser advocates in dealing with failing students:

> All of our educational program, no matter how we analyze it and separate it and organize it, has to follow pathways so that the child, when in school, can identify himself a success (47:12).

The need to give individual differences greater recognition in the instruction plan for remediation implies relevant research evidence appropriate to given situations. The reasons for individual student failures and problems need to be understood and remedied before more cognitive stress is placed on the child.

Remedial efforts will not work for all students, even some who try very hard. They will not be able to learn in two or three years what they haven't learned in all their early schooling experiences. This implies that some will be denied a diploma and poses a question concerning the number of students for whom a school can deny a diploma. The implications are evident for a potential drop-out problem as well as for the potential unemployment of the non-diploma student.

Finally, it appears important that the educational perspective maintains a balance of emphasis on the socio-economic development of the student along with the cognitive and information half of the learning equation. As Combs notes:

> To accomplish its goals, our educational system must achieve both behavioral and humanistic objectives or fail us all--society, parents, and students alike (56:56).

Discussions

This study attempted to examine the emerging pattern of minimum competency testing as a high school graduation requirement. The educational implications are many. The purpose and value of school philosophies and practices need re-examination. The student, the teacher, and the community need to assume vital roles in this current movement. The following educational implications related to competency testing requirements in high school were developed from ideas gained from the study and the review of the literature. The investigator has gone beyond the limits of the findings. In general, the review of literature supports these ideas. The reader may accept or reject these statements according to personal educational stance.

1. The states delegating the responsibility for developing minimum standards to local districts are placing the burden for the implementation on the teaching and administrative staffs of the schools. A practical concern is generated among many teachers who have not been involved in any competency-based program and who will need considerable in-service training.

2. Most local districts are required to develop programs in cooperation with the community. Ideas, methods, and testing procedures will need to be explained to the parents and the general public using relevant research and knowledge to promote community involvement and support.

3. There is a danger in administrative directives which often lose sight of the structure of learning within the classroom. The minimum competency testing program needs to recognize the individual needs of the teacher as well as the child. Therefore, realistic

scheduling of instructional programs should consider adequate preparation and evalaution time and the setting of reasonable student-teacher ratios per class. Generally speaking, both students and teachers should have adequate time for learning and teaching scheduled into their programs.

4. Legislation mandates competency be demonstrated in the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation. Students read and write in all content areas of the curriculum. Questions need to be addressed concerning whether schools will stress the basic skills in specially designated skills classes, whether they will be limited to language arts and reading classes and neglected in the other content area subjects, or whether the skills will be incorporated into the total instructional plan of all classes. Overall, skills need to be an integral part of the total instructional plan for all classes.

5. An assumption of the skills mandates is that the schools are staffed and equipped to teach developmental and remedial skills. The secondary teacher is often trained in specialized content areas with little or no exposure to reading and writing practices and skills. This implies a need for all teachers in all subject areas to have training in effective methods of applying basic skills in the planning of respective content areas.

6. Educators are concerned about the possibility that objectives involving hard-to-measure skills may be slighted and the curriculum narrowed to that which is testable. In such cases, the tests may eventually dictate what is taught in the schools.

7. In like manner, the emphasis on basic skills may lead to subject areas' receiving inadequate institutional and financial support if they are not a mandated competency area.

8. There is a need for all concerned, from parents to legislators, to understand what different tests and evaluative measures mean and why they are being used in the programs.

9. Remedial provisions for students' having difficulty meeting the required competencies are being required. However, little attention has been given in the mandates to exactly what form and to what extent this would take place in the high schools.

As cited in Chapter II, the availability of well thought-out remediation efforts on a broad scale will be important in determining whether minimum competency testing programs really help to improve education in the schools. The meaning and purpose of remedial programs needs to be carefully qualified and defined. Programs that are partial in focus, underplanned and understaffed demand attention so resources can be concentrated where most needed.

Effective remediation for skill-deficient students results when programs are supervised by qualified, experienced teachers who can properly administer diagnostic procedures, and can select appropriate methods and materials to meet individual needs of each student.

10. Attention is focused on the area of educational alternatives for all students to be able to complete high school outside the conventional classroom structure. Many students need the opportunity to receive skills and experiences in situations that are less constrained and often richer than those generally possible in school classrooms.

11. Overall, the district and the schools will need to re-evaluate and re-examine the basic premise of education as dictated by the minimum competency programs. In the end, decisions and teaching environments must remain relevant to the needs and interests of the individual child.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for further study are presented in this section. The following suggestions for study are considered important because they address some of the many problems and questions encountered in the study and the related literature.

1. Extensive studies will be needed to ascertain how many students are denied graduation due to mandated policy requirements for a diploma.

2. Studies by schools are needed to determine the long-range effectiveness of their proficiency assessment or school programs. Follow-up studies of students who earn a diploma under the new competency programs will help identify strengths and weaknesses of the educational programs and may suggest areas in which the curriculum may be modified.

3. Studies are needed to monitor the successes and failures of active minimum competency testing programs throughout the United States and to share the findings.

4. Research is needed regarding what teachers in the classroom think is involved in achieving effectiveness in teaching skill-deficient students.

5. Extensive research effort is needed to identify systematically the competencies needed for major adult life skills since the legislative emphasis is directed to adult life skills.

6. Studies are needed to determine the most efficacious procedure for developing measuring devices which actually test individual achievement and competency.

7. Studies are needed to determine the effects of basic skills mandates on innovative programs in the schools.

8. Research studies are needed to investigate whether changes for educational improvement demanded by the competency movement make a significant difference in the overall achievement of students.

Reflections

Glasser sums up the real purpose of education:

> Actually, it's not important for us to spend a great deal of time evaluating other people. This really isn't necessary. What's very, very necessary is that we spend time evaluating ourselves, and that we set up our schools so that children can spend a great deal of time evaluating themselves. In the end, this is what counts. It's not what other people say of you that's terribly important; it's your impression of yourself, relative to others and to everything else (47:11)

The investigator hopes that further research and understanding will, indeed, be profitable with respect to improving the achievement of students in schools today. One should not allow a testing program to interfere with meeting the needs of individual students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER SENT TO

STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

CONCERNING MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING PROGRAMS

61 West Winspear Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14214

Dear Educator:

The development of Minimal Competency Testing programs for grade level advancement and for high school graduation in your regional area is of particular interest to me for my doctoral research project. I am conducting an intensive study of the minimal competency tests in English, language arts, and reading that were required in various school systems this past school year.

I should like to obtain available copies of your required tests and any current observations or dialogue that you may consider pertinent to the issue and that you may be able to provide on the subject.

I shall be happy to send a summary of my findings upon request in consideration for your assistance.

Thank you for your time and your concern.

Sincerely,

CAROL I. DEAN
Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF KEY RESONSES OF STATES NOT INCLUDED IN THE REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF STATES IN THIS STUDY

SUMMARY OF KEY RESPONSES OF
STATES NOT INCLUDED IN THE REPRESENTATIVE
SAMPLE OF STATES IN THIS STUDY

Alabama

Recommendations concerning a state basic skills test for high school graduation were due July 1, 1978. The State Department committee has completed a rough draft of competencies. Test items will be written after the competencies have been refined and approved, and the State Superintendent has asked the State Board's approval of a year of piloting in selected school systems.

(Note: graduation requirements will be effective with the class of 1981).

Alaska

The State Department is in the process of working with school districts and others on the development of guidelines for districts to develop optional local programs for competency-based education. They do not anticipate having the final guidelines completed and to the legislature before November 1978.

Arizona

Legislation mandated the State Board of Education, in cooperation with all local districts, to develop, establish, and direct the implementation of a continuous uniform evaluation system of pupil achievements in relation to measurable performance objectives in the basic subjects of reading, writing, and computational skills.

There is no statewide competency test, as specific competencies are determined and evaluated at the local school district level. The assessment measure is a locally-selected paper-and-pencil standardized achievement test.

The development of alternate learning procedures are required to help pupils attain their individual learning expectancy levels based on intelligence factors, achievement factors, and teacher evaluation. The K-12 structure is conducive to early detection of learning difficulties.

Effective January 1976, students have to be able to read, write, and compute at the ninth grade level ot quality for high school graduation. A sixth grade level is required to receive an eighth grade certificate.

(Note: the graduating class of 1976 was the first in the United States required to pass minimum competency testing in reading and mathematics.)

Arkansas

Arkansas does not require minimum competency testing in its schools. However, the General Assembly, in 1977, mandated the State Board to establish educational goals for the State of Arkansas. Public hearings were held throughout the state to determine the performance goals for the various grades and subject areas within the public schools including, but not limited to, basic skills in reading (the first priority), basic math skills, communications, and problem solving. The "Arkansas Goals for Education" were adopted in December 1977.

Colorado

Under the Colorado constitution, instruction is the responsibility of the local districts, while the state has a general supervision responsibility. Colorado does not now have any prescribed state curriculum, objectives, achievement tests, graduation requirements or minimal competencies. Curriculum, instruction, assessment and graduation requirements are locally determined. There are no state curriculum guides.

Colorado does have a State Educational Accountability Act which requires that districts develop the planning process to improve education. It is a local control model that requires community involvement.

Colorado also has a law that says if a school district has a test requirement for graduation, then testing must begin in the ninth grade, the test must be given twice a year, and remedial help must be provided those who fail.

(Note: Denver has required tests in reading, language, spelling, and numerical proficiency which are administered twice a year starting in the ninth grade. They have been required for high school graduation since 1960. A compensatory program includes tutoring and courses in basic reading and mathematics.)

Georgia

Georgia's new high school graduation requirements were adopted in 1976 by the State Board of Education. During the 1977-78 school term, the new requirements were field-tested in nine pilot school systems. Local school systems will develop plans for adopting/adapting pilot models in 1978-79. Statewide implementation of graduation

requirements, set for the class of 1983, will be contingent upon positive evaluation of the pilot programs.

The adult life role competencies that will be required as minimum expectations of all graduates in Georgia will be the skills needed for success in the roles of learners, individuals, citizens, consumers, and producers. The local school systems are to establish performance objectives and performance indicators based on community input.

The measurement of student achievement will be a shared responsibility. Through the use of criterion-referenced testing programs, the State Department will provide verification in basic skills performance. The local educational agency will provide verification of the application of skills in life role contexts. The competencies are to be tested at the lowest grade feasible, but no later than the ninth grade. All recording of attainment of performance objectives shall become a part of the student's permanent record, and a cumulative report will be available for review at all times.

A standard diploma will indicate that the student has met all the requirements for graduation. A certificate of performance will indicate that a student has met minimum performance objectives. These performance certificates will be awarded whether or not the pupil completes all the requirements for graduation. Students who have met some, but not all, of the requirements for a diploma and who have chose to end formal schooling will receive certificates of performance verifying the skills or competencies which they have acquired.

Georgia has a statewide testing program for all students in grades four, eight, and ten. The tests were developed in Georgia and relate

to the specific learning objectives that Georgia educators selected as essential in the areas of reading, mathematics, and career development.

Hawaii

The Office of Instruction has conducted a task force review of graduation requirements and the identification of minimum competencies. The only test developed thus far is the "Hawaii State Test of Essential Competencies." The essential competencies for graduation on which the test is based include reading, writing, communication skills, computational skills, reasoning skills, and skills necessary for independent learning, career planning, and citizenship.

Idaho

A statewide program of testing for qualification to graduate from the twelfth grade may be instituted by any school district in Idaho. Proficiency testing will include tests in reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling, which are developed and supervised by the State Department of Education.

Proficiency testing in the public schools on a district option basis was approved by the State Board of Education in February 1977. A sample test was administered on a pilot basis in the fall of 1978. Adjustments will be made and the test finalized for use with the ninth grade classes in the spring of 1979.

If a school system chooses to utilize the proficiency test program, the district will be required to use the state-developed tests twice a year, beginning with grade nine. A student will continue to take only those portions of the test program which he or she fails. Students who fail to obtain satisfactory scores shall be provided

remedial and/or tutorial services by the local school system during the regular school day in the subject areas in which the test indicates a deficiency exists.

Students who pass the proficiency tests shall be recognized by the placing of a State Board of Education Seal on the student's diploma. The state seal will be available to the graduating class of 1982. Students who do not pass all four sections of the test, but who meet the other graduation requirements, will receive their diplomas without the state seal. Students may also receive certificates of attendance if they do not meet all the requirements.

Illinois

The General Assembly of Illinois enacted an addition to the School Code to direct the State Board of Education to prepare procedures and materials by December 1978, to encourage and assist local school districts to develop minimal competency testing programs. The Board is to report to the legislature recommendations for legislation resulting from its policy study by June 1980.

Indiana

Indiana does not have a statewide minimal competency testing program for high school graduation.

A state educational improvement program will be implemented in the school year 1978-79 with evaluation and follow-up in reading, composition, and spelling. In successive years the program will be expanded cumulatively by adding subject matter areas (1979--social studies, 1980--mathematics, 1981--science).

Committees comprised of school and community members determine local standards of student performance. Assessment of students is to take place at four levels comparable to grades three, six, eight, and ten. Schools have the option of developing their own tests, using commercially-prepared tests or requesting state departments' assistance. Each school system shall have the option of using test scores as a local graduation requirement in addition to the established state graduation requirements.

Iowa

The state of Iowa has not mandated minimal competency testing in any subject. Legislation has been proposed, but it was not passed. There are no local school district minimal competency requirements for graduation in the state.

Maryland

The Maryland State Board of Education adopted the plan for "Project Basic" in December 1976. Five areas to which special attention must be given are: (1) basic skills of reading, writing, and the ability to calculate; (2) world of work; (3) world of leisure time; (4) citizenship; and (5) survival skills. The Maryland program will define the range of minimal competencies within these areas and require their achievement for graduation. Grade-by-grade minimal competencies in reading and mathematics have been developed. The State Board calls for adoption of competencies by June 1982. Mastery will be required of all students as a condition of graduation.

The "Maryland Functional Reading Test" is administered statewide at grades seven, nine, and eleven, and optionally at grade twelve. The

program was developed to establish a basic functional reading competency level for Maryland students.

Massachusetts

In June 1977, the Advisory Committee on High School Graduation Requirements was established to study and prepare recommendations for the State Board of Education regarding the establishment of minimum standards of competency in certain basic skills areas to be achieved by students prior to graduation from high school. The State Board granted preliminary approval to the committee recommendations in June 1978.

Each school district will have the responsiblity to establish minimum standards for the basic skills areas for mathematics and communication skills by no later than September 1980. Each district will have the responsibility for evaluating the basic skills competency of each student at the early elementary, later elementary, and secondary levels (no later than grade nine). Tests are to be decided on at the local level.

The Advisory Committee recommended that no state policy be adopted that requires the passing of a competency test or tests as a requirement for high school graduation for at least five years. This would allow each district to establish a basic skills competency program. There is no assurance, at the present time, that a state-imposed competency test would deal with the content to which students in a district have been exposed in their school experience. The State Board has not adopted a policy making the awarding of a high school diploma contingent on satisfactory performance on a competency test. On the basis of local experience, however, the Board will review the need for including basic

skills competency as one of the requirements for a diploma in the future.

Michigan

The "Michigan Educational Assessment Program" tests in reading and mathematics are given to all fourth, seventh, and tenth graders. The purpose of the testing is to provide information on the status and progress of Michigan basic skills education to state officials, local educators, teachers, students, and parents.

Twelfth grade life-role competencies have been under study by the State Department of Education. No plan has been approved for the implementation of minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation although recommendations and proposals are being made.

Minnesota

Minnesota does not have any required examinations for students. It does not have any standardized or even recommended competency tests in the various subject areas. The determination of levels of performance and competencies learned is assigned to local school districts. The State Board of Education rejected any standarization of competency testing at this time.

Missouri

The "Missouri Basic Essential Skills Test" is a state-developed paper-and-pencil test administered to all eighth graders in the spring semester. Students are expected to show competence in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and government/economics. The BEST also includes additional objectives to be assessed by the local

educators. The students must take the tests each year until all are satisfactorily passed. The testing becomes mandatory in 1979. The State Board of Education will consider at a later time whether state minimum graduation requirements will be amended to require students to pass the test in order to receive a high school diploma.

Montana

Montana does not have required competency tests. It does have a comprehensive state testing program for grades six and twelve that has the voluntary participation of a majority of the state's schools. The tests are designed to measure student performance in relation to the Montana Goals for Education. The tests were developed at the state level. Individuals from local districts were involved in selecting and writing the test items.

The "Goals for Education" were developed by a task force which defined the initial goal statements. Final preferences and priorities for the goals were establsihed through a statewide survey of Montana citizens.

Nebraska

In May 1977, the Nebraska State Board of Education approved a motion recommending that Nebraska schools place greater emphasis on the basics, and reaffirmed policy provisions for programs in the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and the ability to communicate in writing, spelling, and language arts to be maintained in all schools. The "Nebraska Assessment Battery of Essential Learning Skills" (N-ABELS) was developed to help fill this need in schools. The N-ABELS test covers essential reading, writing, mathematics, and reference skills. It is a

goal-referenced test with skills expercises given only after the child has had the chance to learn the skill. Some students will be ready for some of the tests in the fifth grade, and most students should be included by the end of the seventh grade. Other skills should be continued into secondary school. The tests are intended to help students gain skills and should never be used as a basis for promotion or retention.

Local districts may choose to develop their own tests. The N-ABELS was developed to serve as a uniform standard for educational literacy within the state of Nebraska.

Nevada

Competency testing was mandated by the legislature in July 1977. Students are tested at the end of grades three, six, and nine in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Students may be promoted, but remedial work must be provided. Testing will begin in grade twelve in the 1981-82 school year and will be a requirement for graduation for the class of 1982. The State Department is in the process of developing the test items for the twelfth grade competencies which form the basis for the tests.

New Hampshire

The "New Hampshire Accountability Plan" directs each school system to identify essential fields of student learning to include, but not be limited to, English language arts, mathematics, United States history and government, and New Hampshire history and government. Upon receipt of the guidelines furnished by the State Department, each district must design a program, by January 1979, showing how the accountability plan

will be carried out. By June 1981, each school district must develop essential student outcomes for both the state-mandated and locally designated fields of learning. Districts must develop performance indicators for all essential outcomes for grades four, eight, and twelve. All steps in the accountability process must be completed and a report submitted to the State Accountability Unit no later than June 1981.

New Jersey

The Public Laws of New Jersey established, in September 1976, uniform statewide standards in the basic communication and computational skills. In November 1976, the State Board of Education adopted the "Minimum Basic Skills Program." Criterion-referenced tests in reading and mathematics would be administered in grades three, six, nine, and eleven, starting in the 1977-78 school year. The tests were developed for New Jersey by the Educational Testing Service, based on the results of surveys of educators, students, school board members, and the general public. The testing program is a vehicle for assessing student educational attainment. It serves to identify students who need remedial assistance to meet the state standards.

North Dakota

At the present time, at the state level, North Dakota has no required minimal competency tests. Some school districts are making plans to begin preparation of tests for minimal competency in basic skills; however, none has been developed as yet.

Ohio

The Ohio Department of Education has not mandated nor developed minimum competency tests for use in local school districts. Presently, it is defining its technical assistance responsibilities in assisting schools in the development of local programs. Recommendation of the Assessment Advisory Committee opposes the use of any state-mandated test as a final determination for promotion or graduation.

Oklahoma

The State Department of Education does not have requirements for minimal competency tests.

Pennsylvania

"Project '81" is a pilot project in twelve model school districts in Pennsylvania to define competency standards, to include the competency standards in the graduation requirements, and to involve the community in the schooling process. The Department of Education anticipates that the pilot phase of the project will be completed by 1981, and then they will decide whether to change Pennsylvania's graduation requirements.

Project '81 is a "process" of redefining the purpose of education in terms of the competencies which children and young people should be acquiring at the various levels in school. Once the final competencies are established, some may become requirements of the district. These competencies, combined with ones local districts may choose to add, will be incorporated into graduation requirements.

Students will be asked to show competency in basic skills areas of reading, writing and speaking, computation, physical dexterity, problem

solving, and interpersonal relations, as well as application of the basic skills in life-roles areas of citizenship, work, leisure, and home life. Local communities and districts will be responsible for defining additional skills in order to meet the unique needs of the community.

As a result of the pilot project, the State Board will make a decision concerning statewide graduation requirements based on the newly defined competencies.

South Carolina

South Carolina is not currently using a minimal competency test, although one will be developed over the next two years and implemented in 1980-81.

Initial minimal competency legialation was introduced in January 1977. A task force was formed to guide the study of competency testing which would include recommendations for minimal competency levels for high school graduation. The State Department was charged with developing or selecting and field-testing a competency-based student assessment program.

Tennessee

After a one-year study and several public hearings, the State Board of Education passed the resolution to require passing a proficiency test in the basic skills areas as a prerequisite for receiving a high school diploma. A high school proficiency test will be required for graduation in 1982. The test will be administered at the end of eleventh grade, with two additional opportunities provided for retesting as

necessary in the twelfth grade. The decision was made to have a testing company develop an examination to meet the requirements of Tennessee.

In the spring of 1978, the "Basic Skills Test" was administered to eighth graders statewide to acquaint them with the type of test and objectives which will be required for receiving a diploma when they graduate. The results of the preliminary test will be used to establish remedial programs for those students who had fewer than seventy percent correct answers in each area tested.

The local system is required to administer a test at the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade level and at the eighth grade level for diagnostic purposes. Skills in mathematics, reading comprehension and vocabulary, grammar and spelling are recommended as those to be tested.

Texas

The state of Texas does not have a program of minimal competency testing. The State Board of Education's "Goals for Public School Education in Texas" states that in terms of their individual ability, all students should acquire knowledge of the traditionally-accepted fundamentals, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Consistent with this policy, by 1980, students completing high school should demonstrate the attainment of the essential knowledge, skills, and competencies in reading and mathematics.

Senate Concurrent Resolution in 1977 resolved that the State Board be directed to revise its accreditation standards to require school districts to evaluate their educational programs in terms of the Goals of Education, and to require each school district to assess the proficiency

of its students in basic skills at designated grade levels, as well as to formulate plans for remedial programs, if necessary.

Local districts are not directed to use a specific test to measure student progress; each has the prerogative to select or develop the instrument and method for evalution.

Statewide assessments in reading and mathematics (grades six and eleven) and writing and citizenship (ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen) were conducted on a sampling basis to provide data on the learning outcomes in priority areas for specific recommendations to the next meeting of the legislature in 1979.

Virginia

Legislation by the General Assembly in 1978 mandated statewide testing in reading and mathematics as a requirement for graduation for the class of 1981. The Virginia tests for minimum competencies will be first given during the school year 1978-79 to ninth and tenth graders. Because of the suddenness of the legislation requiring such tests, the State Department has not met full conceptualization of such problems as setting cut-off scores and retesting procedures. The State Department has purchased two commercially developed tests for current testing until such time as they can produce their own tests.

West Virginia

Minimal competency tests are not required. The Department of Education has tests in the development stages for field testing this year.

Wisconsin

The policy of the Department of Public Instruction states that competency-based education is the responsibility of the local school district. The role of the state will be to provide assistance. Pursuant to this service, the state pupil assessment program will develop a bank of competencies and items.

Wyoming

Wyoming has not adopted competency standards for graduation or promotions. The State Board of Education does not advocate a state testing program for competeicnes.

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