

UCLA

High School Exit Exam Series

Title

Policy Brief: High School Exit Exam Failure Rates and Opportunity to Learn

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High School Exit Exam Failure Rates and Opportunity to Learn

California has required students to take the High School Exit Exam since 2001. This exam assesses core academic skills in two areas: Mathematics and English Language Arts. To date, the results of the Exit Exam have been used as part of California's accountability system. Current law calls for the state to withhold diplomas from students in the class of 2006 who do not pass either section of the Exit Exam. The law also states that it is the responsibility of school districts to "prepare pupils to succeed."

How many California students are at risk of being denied a diploma?

- 96,951 students in the class of 2006 failed the Math section of the Exit Exam when they took it in 10th grade. This figure represents 24% of all test takers.
- 96,906 students in the class of 2006 failed the English Language Arts section of the Exit Exam when they took it in 10th grade. This figure represents 23% of all test takers.

Are some groups of California students more likely to be denied a diploma on the basis of their Exit Exam performance?

- 60% of English Learners in the class of 2006 failed the English Language Arts section.
- 42% of African Americans and 36% of Latino students in the class of 2006 failed the Math section.
- 69% of Special Education students in the class of 2006 failed each section.

Do schools that face serious opportunity problems have higher failure rates?

In California schools with severe teacher shortages and dramatic overcrowding, the average failure rate on the Math section of the Exit Exam is 44%. These same schools have an average failure rate of 40% in English Language Arts.

Do schools covered by the Williams settlement have higher failure rates?

The August 2004 settlement of *Williams v California* identifies a set of schools that lack basic learning conditions and require additional resources and oversight.

The Exit Exam failure rate in Williams high schools is more than 2.5 times higher than the failure rate in non-Williams schools. (40% to 16% on the math section; 39% to 16% on the English Language Arts section.)