

## Align graduation requirements with college and career readiness

**Proposal:** Maintain rigorous graduation requirements that require students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary for success after high school. To this end, policy makers could retain or slightly modify the end-of-course exam (EOC), SAT, or ACT, or industry-credential pathways that students can currently use to meet requirements. Alternatively, options could be explored that require students to demonstrate academic or career-technical competencies *and* meet other indicators of readiness (for example, cumulative GPAs or work experience).

**Background:** State graduation requirements are meant to ensure that students exit high school with the knowledge and skills needed for their next steps in life. For the past decade, Ohio required students to complete coursework and pass the Ohio Graduation Tests to graduate. Yet those tests were set at far too low a level; indeed, they actually assessed eighth-grade-level content, which is not nearly sufficient for true college or career readiness. To lift expectations, Ohio has phased in more challenging graduation standards. Starting with the class of 2018, the state now requires students to meet course requirements and either (1) pass EOC exams, (2) achieve a college-ready score on the ACT or SAT, or (3) earn industry credentials. Within the past year, however, concerns that these requirements expected too much of students led state leaders to soften graduation standards for the class of 2018. At the urging of the State Board of Education, lawmakers weakened the new requirements, adding options based on alternatives such as senior-year GPAs and attendance rates, internship/volunteer hours, and capstone projects. Although some of the alternatives are worthy in their own right, the decision to permit students to fulfill just two of nine possible options allowed them to avoid demonstrating readiness via the exam- or credential-based pathways. Earlier this year, the State Board recommended again that the legislature extend these options to the classes of 2019 and 2020; as of the beginning of July 2018, the legislature has not acted on the Board's proposal.

**Proposal rationale:** To ensure that students exit high school having demonstrated readiness for college or career, Ohio adopted higher graduation standards. But as they've come into effect, policy makers have weakened standards, at least for the class of 2018. With the debate still ongoing around requirements for future classes, the next governor must provide leadership that assures Ohio's graduation standards align with indicators of college or career readiness.

**Cost:** No fiscal impact on the state budget.

**Resources:** For discussion of student motivation and graduation exams, see Paul Peterson's chapter "[Holding Students to Account](#)" in *What Lies Ahead for America's Children and Their Schools* (2014) and Adam Tyner and Michael Petrilli's article "[The Case for Holding Students Accountable](#)" in *Education Next* (2018); for a comparison of states' coursework requirements and college-admission standards, see Laura Jimenez and Scott Sargrad's report [Are High School Diplomas Really a Ticket to College and Work? An Audit of State High School Graduation Requirements](#), published by the Center for American Progress (2018); for more on states' alignment of diplomas with college and career readiness, see Monica Almond's 2017 report [Paper Thin? Why All High School Diplomas Are Not Created Equal](#), published by the Alliance for Excellent Education; and for information about Ohio's graduation requirements, see ODE's "[Ohio Pathways for a High School Diploma](#)."