



Policy on Exit Exams for Students with Exceptionalities

Policy

To ensure that exit exams are appropriately carried out regarding students with exceptionalities, it is the position of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) that:

- a) No single test score should be used to make critical educational decisions for students with exceptionalities. Multiple measures that document student learning and skills development should be used with accommodations when appropriate, in the decision-making process.
- b) All students with exceptionalities must be given the opportunity to learn the material that is covered on exit exams. This includes the provision of individualized instructional services and supports that address the general education curriculum that is aligned with standards, test content, and the student's IEP. An alternate assessment should be an option for a student as recommended by the IEP team.
- c) Advance notice should be given to all students with exceptionalities and their parents on the consequences of exit exams. This should include (1) a description of the steps to be taken to prepare students and teachers for the tests themselves; (2) any additional resources/supports that are available to ensure adequate performance on the tests; and (3) a clear statement for parents and students that explains what decisions may be made on the basis of the test results.
- d) On-going research should be conducted on the impact of exit exams for students with exceptionalities that address issues, such as, grade-level retention/promotion, referral rates for special education, and any limits on future employment and educational experiences resulting from alternative high school diplomas.

Background

“High-stakes” testing, in the form of exit exams, is not a new concept. The idea began nearly 25 years ago and at that time was called minimum competency testing. Both types of testing have at their core the need to ensure that students graduate from high school with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in life. With the advent of standards-

based reform, coupled with educational accountability, the use of exit exams to measure student performance has become “high-stakes” testing. Currently, many states and provinces require students with exceptionalities to pass state exit exam(s)/ “ high-stakes” test(s) in order to receive a standard high school diploma.

CEC supports many of the intended consequences of requiring students with exceptionalities to pass exit exams, in order to receive a standard high school diploma. These would include: increased participation in the general education curriculum; higher academic expectations and opportunities; reduced perceived differences between students with and without exceptionalities, resulting in improvements in instructional strategies for all students; increased motivations for students and teachers; and overall increased educational accountability.

However, given the limited availability of research on the use of exit exams testing with students with exceptionalities, CEC is strongly concerned about the possible unintended consequences. Several examples of potentially negative outcomes include: higher dropout rates among students with exceptionalities; lower self-esteem resulting from repeated failures on exit exams; increased grade retention; lowered standards and limited curricula options; inappropriate emphasis on “teaching to the test”; decrease in the number of students with disabilities receiving a standard high school diploma; increased use of alternative diplomas that may limit post-secondary education and employment opportunities; and increased dissatisfaction of parents and increased conflicts between parents and schools.

Reference

Council for Exceptional Children 2004 Policy Manual; Section Three, Part 1, Chapter 3, Para.14.

Date Adopted

Approved by the Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors April 15, 2004.