

Graduation exams face test

Education officials seek replacement, consider ACT for high school students

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COLUMBUS: Educators studying a replacement for Ohio's Graduation Test say the new method must determine whether high school students are prepared for college or the workplace, not whether they simply know 10th-grade material.

As part of a state budget passed last summer, the Ohio Education Department was directed to find a new exam to replace the five-part Ohio Graduation Test.

By next summer, the department must convene a group to recommend which exams to pick and how they should be scored.

"There's a lot of experimenting going on right now," said Stan Heffner, an associate superintendent in the Ohio Department of Education. "We've got a lot of work to do explaining what this new assessment system might look like."

The graduation test doesn't effectively measure high-level reasoning and critical-thinking skills, said Mark Real, president and chief executive of the Columbus education nonprofit KidsOhio.org.

Whatever replaces it should test fewer, but more relevant, topics, he said.

The ACT college-entrance exam is being closely evaluated around the state, though no decision has been made to use it as the replacement for the graduation test.

For example, the state is studying how juniors in Cincinnati and Lorain fare on the ACT in comparison to how they perform on the graduation test.

The largest study — a \$5 million pilot in 44 schools being conducted by the nonprofit Battelle for Kids — is looking at end-of-course exams that were developed by ACT.

Students involved in the pilot are taking tests in algebra I and II, English, geometry, pre-calculus, biology and chemistry. The tests are tied to value-added measures, which show whether students learned an appropriate amount of material during the course.

"Our target has been a graduation test. The target for the future is preparing all students for college and the world of work. And those are different targets," he said, said Mark Hartman of Battelle for Kids, a Columbus nonprofit organization.