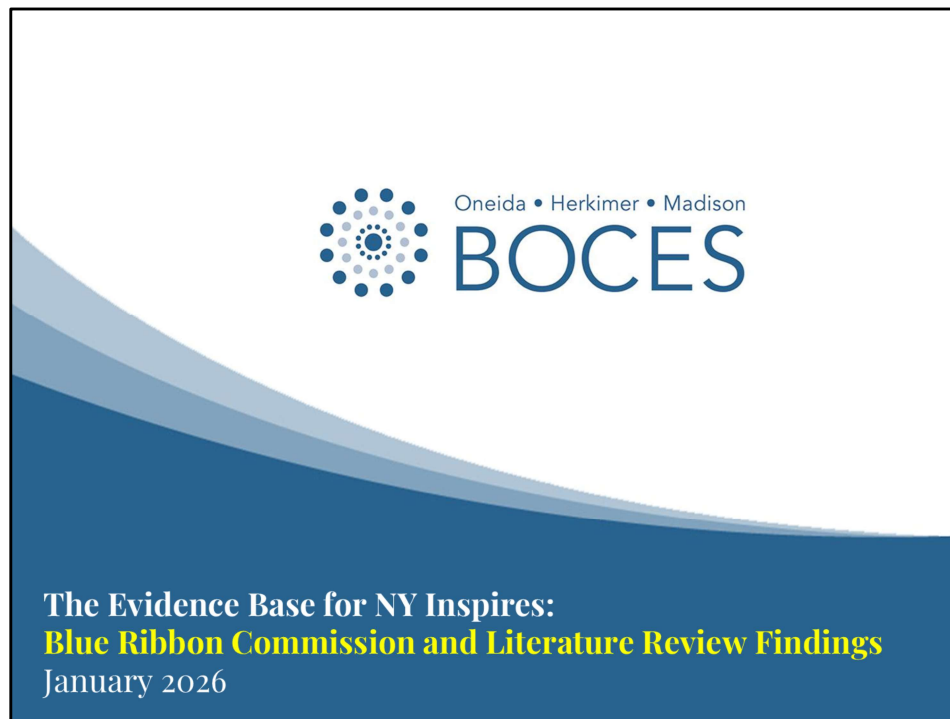




1. Welcome to today's presentation.
2. In 2019, the New York State Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures was charged by the Education Department with reimagining the state's high school graduation requirements to ensure they are rigorous, equitable, and relevant to the needs of 21st-century learners.
3. To fulfill this mandate, the Commission launched a comprehensive research strategy organized into three distinct avenues of inquiry: a stakeholder input phase, a state scan, and a robust literature review. Together, these three pillars provided the foundational data necessary to recommend a modernized framework that balances academic standards with flexible opportunities for student mastery.

Overview

- Stakeholder Input and Priorities
- The impact of rigorous requirements
- Opportunities for success



Blue Ribbon
Commission
on Graduation
Measures

NOVEMBER 12, 2012

Today we will examine critical findings surfaced through these efforts, including

1. a high-level overview of stakeholder input and proposed priorities,
2. an analysis of how other states are implementing diploma pathways,
3. the evidence base connecting graduation requirements to long-term college and career success.

Stakeholder Input



1. One facet of this exploration was to gather input from stakeholders across the state to ensure that any proposed changes to graduation measures reflected the diverse needs, values, and lived experiences of all New York's students and families."
2. The commission purposefully sought input from a broad cross-section of New Yorkers to ensure the recommendations reflected diverse needs, including students and parents, educators and administrators , higher education and business, and community advocacy groups.
3. Quite possibly you attended a focus-group session at BOCES.

Stakeholder Input and Priorities

- Desire for multiple pathways
- Focus on real-world skills
- Equity and inclusivity
- Simplification of diploma types

The feedback revealed several clear mandates for the future of New York's graduation requirements:

- Stakeholders overwhelmingly called for alternatives to traditional standardized testing, instead favoring multiple pathways where students could demonstrate mastery through capstone projects, internships, performance-based assessments, and portfolios rather than just Regents exams.
- There was a strong consensus that the diploma should reflect "life-readiness" and real world skills. This led to the inclusion of financial literacy, civic responsibility, and ethics in the initial proposed requirements.
- Feedback also emphasized that the current system often penalizes students with different learning styles or life hardships. Stakeholders pushed for more culturally responsive-sustaining education and more flexibility for students facing

extenuating circumstances.

- Finally, stakeholders called for the simplification of Diploma Types: Input suggested that the current system of multiple diploma types (Regents, Advanced Regents, Local) was confusing and created a hierarchy. Stakeholders favored moving to one single diploma for all students, with specialized "seals" or endorsements to show specific achievements.

State Scan Findings



1. Simultaneous to collecting stakeholder feedback, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) commissioned the Region 2 Comprehensive Center to conduct a scan of states to inform the Blue Ribbon Commission's efforts to rethink high school graduation requirements and ensure educational excellence and equity. The report, published in September 2023, followed a series of research activities that began in late 2019 and included a comprehensive literature review.
2. The review examines how several states integrate performance-based assessments into their educational systems to provide students with diverse ways to demonstrate mastery of skills and content. It details implementation themes, such as the importance of teacher collaboration and alignment with state standards, while providing in-depth case studies of seven select states and a consortium.

Core Purposes and Integration Strategies

- Diverse Pathways for Mastery
- Complementary Assessment Systems
- Focus on Deeper Learning .

1. The scan found that several states provide students with multiple, meaningful ways to demonstrate mastery of skills and content beyond traditional standardized assessments.
2. It also found that performance-based tasks were typically integrated as a complement or alternative to standardized tests within a "Balanced Assessment Plan" or a "Menu of Options" for graduation.
3. Finally, it found that these assessments had been designed to measure higher-order thinking, depth of knowledge, and the "essential skills" required for college and career readiness.

Key Pillars of Implementation

- Local Development and Context
- Teacher Capacity and Collaboration
- Alignment and Quality Criteria

1. The scan also found that a critical success factor is ensuring assessments are developed locally by educators to maintain a strong link to classroom instruction and student needs,
2. that effective implementation requires significant investment in building the capacity of educators through professional learning communities and collaborative scoring processes, and
3. that successful states establish "non-negotiable" design criteria and statewide scoring rubrics to ensure all locally developed tasks align with state standards and remain high-quality.

Equity, Inclusion, and Communication

- Promoting Educational Equity
- Support for Diverse Learners
- Transparent Communication and Advocacy



1. Finally, the scan found that performance assessments support equity by allowing for diverse demonstrations of knowledge and honoring different student identities and "ways of knowing".
2. As well, implementation frameworks often include specific provisions for language learners and students with disabilities, such as allowing assessments in a student's home language.
3. And critically, success depends on clear communication with families about the purpose of these assessments and building broad advocacy among policymakers and teachers' unions.

Literature Review



1. The literature review was designed to evaluate the empirical connection between graduation requirements and long-term student success, though the clarity of the evidence varied significantly across different topics. It was driven by a series of guiding questions—such as which specific requirements contribute to college, career, and civic readiness—that yielded a spectrum of findings ranging from robust correlations to more nuanced, mixed results. While some questions could be answered more definitively, such as the clear positive impact of optional rigorous coursework and Algebra II on degree attainment and wages, other areas like the impact of high-stakes exit exams and mandated rigorous curricula presented more complex data, often showing conflicting outcomes for different student populations.

What is the evidence base on the relationship between college, career, and civic readiness indicators and students' success in college and career?

	College Enrollment	College Performance/ Persistence	Degree Attainment	Employment	Wages
Targeted college preparation programs	✓		✓		
Required rigorous college preparatory curriculum	✓				
Participation in optional rigorous coursework	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Algebra II	✓	✓	✓		✓

1. Answers to the first question posed, What is the evidence base on the relationship between college, career, and civic readiness indicators and students' success in college and career, are summarized in the table offered here.
2. To begin, student enrollment in targeted college preparation programs was shown effectively support the transition from high school to post-secondary education and contributed to successful degree completion.
3. At the same time, requiring rigorous college preparatory curriculum can increase college enrollment but may deter some students from completing high school and has been linked to a small increase in dropout rates.
4. Participation in optional rigorous coursework (where students choose to enroll) showed much broader benefits, including positive impacts on college performance, degree attainment, and even future employment.
5. And evidence showed that Algebra II has a strong, multidimensional evidence base for predicting long-term success.

Persona Exercise:

1. Step 1: Create two or three "student personas" based on the data.
 - Persona A: The student who is represented in the data (e.g., a student who took Algebra II and went on to a high-paying job). Describe their potential backstory—their family, their school, their motivations.
 - Persona B: The student who is likely *not* represented. This might be a student from a low-income family, a student of color, or a student who had to work part-time and couldn't take on optional rigorous coursework.
2. Step 2: Ask participants to "tell the story" of each persona. What challenges or advantages did each person face?
3. Step 3: Reflect on the exercise. What did the persona exercise reveal about the limitations of the original data set? How can the school better serve students like "Persona B"?

Which graduation requirements have an evidence base indicating they contribute to the college and career readiness of all students?

1. Required, rigorous college preparatory curriculum - mixed results
 - o May increase number of students who enroll in college immediately after high school
 - o May result in a small increase HS drop out
 - o Marginal improvement in ACT science scores for all.
 - Weakest students having *greater* improvement in ACT composite and science scores.

1. The second question posed, Which graduation requirements have an evidence base indicating they contribute to the college and career readiness of all students, revealed that there are mixed results to implementing a required, rigorous college preparatory curriculum.
 - a. While it may increase the number of students who enroll in college immediately after high school, it may also deter some students from completing high school leading to a small increase in likelihood of HS drop out; more than double for Black and Hispanic males.
 - b. Additionally, studies revealed there was a marginal improvement in ACT science scores for all, with the weakest students having greater improvement in ACT composite and science scores.

Reflection Activity:

1. The data shows a tension between a system's desire to raise standards and its unintended impact on some of its most vulnerable students. As a teacher or principal, what is your role in

advocating for and shaping a system that ensures both high expectations and equitable outcomes for all students?

Which graduation requirements have an evidence base indicating they contribute to the college and career readiness of all students? (continued)

2. Requiring high-stakes graduation assessments - mixed results
 - o Increased dropout rates.
 - o Not positively associated with any college or career outcomes.
 - o Providing other assessment options can mitigate negative effects.

1. Additionally, requiring high-stakes graduation assessments yielded mixed results, showing an evident trade off between college entry and high school completion.
2. The most significant finding was that high-stakes exit exams are linked to increased dropout rates for 12th-grade students. This negative effect is especially large among Black students. Research indicates that in states with these exams but no alternate pathways, dropout rates for 12th graders were as much as 23% higher.
3. The review also concluded that these exams are "not positively associated with any college or career outcomes," meaning they do not necessarily lead to better grades in college or higher wages.
4. The findings also noted that the negative "dropout effect" can be significantly mitigated if the state allows other forms of evidence (such as performance-based assessments or capstone projects) to demonstrate proficiency. For example, dropout rates for African American males in states with an alternate pathway to graduation are less than half as high as in

states where the high-stakes exam is the only option.

Reflection Activity:

1. The finding that allowing other forms of evidence mitigates the dropout effect suggests the system can and should adapt. What are the barriers within our system—whether they be policy, resources, or mindset—that prevent us from implementing more flexible and equitable forms of assessment? What role does each of us play in challenging those barriers?

Which additional high school experiences and opportunities have an evidence base indicating they contribute to the college and career readiness of all students?

- Early college
- Peer support
- Service learning
- Taking one AP, IB, or honors course in any subject
- Dual enrollment

1. The third question posed, Which additional high school experiences and opportunities have an evidence base indicate they contribute to the college and career readiness of all students, revealed that several strategies show positive outcomes for students:
 - a. Early college and dual enrollment programs, peer support, and service-learning can all significantly improve student outcomes, including graduation rates and college attainment.
 - b. Additionally, taking at least one AP, IB, or honors course in any subject is linked to positive college performance/persistence and degree attainment.
 - c. And dual-enrollment in at least one course has consistently been shown to predict higher perceptions of college readiness and lead to increased rates of college enrollment and completion.

Reflection Question:

1. The data suggests that a single rigorous course can boost

performance and persistence in college, but the previous findings highlighted the risks of required rigor. How can you use the "one course" finding to inform a system-wide strategy that encourages students to challenge themselves without a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach? What would "rigor by choice" look like in practice, and how would we measure its success beyond just a test score?

What is the evidence base that offering flexible pathways to a diploma contributes to the college and career readiness of all students?

- Pathways that allow students to demonstrate proficiency without passing the state-mandated exam appear to mitigate the effect of exit exams on dropout rates.
- Alternate pathways to graduation do not generally impact dropout rates for Hispanic students

1. The last question posed, What is the evidence based that offering flexible pathways to a diploma contributes to the college and career readiness of all students, revealed that providing students with an alternative pathway to demonstrate proficiency in place of a state-mandated exit exam appears to lower dropout rates for some groups but not others.
2. This is to say that while pathways that allow students to demonstrate proficiency without passing the state-mandated exam appear to mitigate the effect of exit exams on dropout rates. For example, dropout rates for African American males in states with an alternate pathway to graduation are less than half as high as dropout rates in states with no alternate pathway.
3. However, alternate pathways to graduation do not generally impact dropout rates for Hispanic students

Reflection Question:

1. If we are to move away from a single, high-stakes exam as the

primary measure of proficiency, what are your biggest fears or concerns about ensuring students are truly prepared for their next step?"

Understanding the Scope of the Evidence



1. This evidence provides a rigorous foundation, though it represents a "snapshot" of specific cohorts rather than a finished blueprint. Our data is notably "noisier" regarding career success than college enrollment, as tracking long-term job performance remains a major challenge in educational research. Since this research relies on historical data, it may not reflect recent innovations like the "Portrait of a Graduate" or modern CTE models. We must balance these findings with the "on-the-ground" wisdom of our current educators and industry partners.
2. Despite these limitations, this evidence is a vital asset providing a research-backed signal on which programs offer the strongest return for students. Our work moving forward is to use these insights as a compass to inform local decisions while remaining responsive to the unique needs of our communities.

Thank You

