

A SURVEY OF THE OPINIONS OF STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
INSTRUCTION OFFICIALS CONCERNING THE ADVANTAGES
AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING MINIMUM COMPETENCY
TESTS AS A CRITERION FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

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ABSTRACT

VON KLEIN, Max. A survey of the opinions of state department of public instruction officials concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using minimum competency tests as a criterion for high school graduation. M. S. in Education - Professional Development, 1982. 93 p. (Dr. Burton Altman).

The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of state departments of public instruction officials toward utilizing minimum competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation. This study also examined procedures used to implement a competency testing program.

The following research hypotheses were formulated.

1. What are the opinions of state department of public instruction officials concerning the utilization of minimum competency examinations as one of the criteria for high school graduation?
2. What procedures and processes are employed by state department of public instruction officials in states that have implemented some form of a minimum competency requirement?

The current leader of each state department of public instruction was identified. They were the population for this study.

A fifty-one item questionnaire was developed to survey the opinions of the state department of public instruction officials concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using minimum competency testing for high school graduation. The instrument was divided into three parts: Part I requested general information about the respondent and his/her

state; Part II consisted of opinion statements structured around areas of debate in the use of minimum competency testing; Part III gathered information about the nature of competency testing programs in the states using them.

Forty-seven of the original fifty questionnaires were returned, producing a 94% rate of return. Each response on the questionnaire was converted to percentages. A Chi Square test (χ^2) incorporating the Yates Correction Factor was used to determine if there were significant differences at the .05 level between the expected and observed responses.

From analyzing the similarities and differences that were observed in this questionnaire, the following conclusions were made:

1. Respondents believed that current educational practice is inadequate and MCTP is one means to stop the decline in student and school performance. Disagreement exists concerning whether MCT are all that are needed to stop this decline;

2. MCTP were viewed as having some educational use, but the measurement of educational growth was not one of them;

3. The role of state authorities is increasingly taking over evaluation responsibilities that were once the exclusive responsibility of local school districts;

4. Liberal and fine arts programs were not being diminished as a result of MCTP;

5. Because current testing methods do not adequately measure critical thinking and creativity, there is a possibility that these skills will be less emphasized in MCTP;

6. Improper reporting of test results could pose a danger to teachers if scores are used as an indicator of teacher competency; and,

7. MCTP could tend to shift accountability of student failure from the school to the student.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

The evaluation of the cognitive abilities of secondary students enrolled in public and private schools in the United States has been the responsibility and the concern of classroom teachers for many years. Educators have sought assessment measures which could accurately predict success in school and serve as indicators for achievement upon completion of high school. In an effort to plan appropriate instructional activities, educators utilized diagnostic tests, standardized tests, teacher-made tests, and teacher judgement to determine the academic needs and achievements of students. For many years, these procedures for evaluating student progress appeared effective.

During the early 1970's proponents of accountability in public education and, later, those in the back-to-basics movement began to articulate their dissatisfaction and disappointment in the product of public schools, namely, the high school graduates. These proponents began to cite examples of high school graduates who could not read, write, or compute mathematically. They, further, began to challenge the practice of awarding high school diplomas as certificates of achievement if, in fact, these were certificates of attendance.

Confidence in public education was shaken. The general public demanded accountability from state and local authorities who were

responsible for educating the students. State legislators listened to the complaints of their constituencies. Department of public instruction officials, school administrators, and teachers reacted in various ways.

One result of this dissatisfaction has been the inclusion of minimum competency examinations by some state and local public school districts as a criterion for evaluating the acquisition of cognitive information by high school students. In some of these districts, these examinations have been used to determine whether a student has met the requirements necessary for the awarding of a high school diploma.

Statement of the Problem

The use of minimum competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduates is increasing. Dearman and Plisko (1980) reported that eighteen states have passed legislation that mandates the successful completion of competency-based examinations as a requirement for high school graduation.

The trend toward including minimum competency examinations as a requirement for graduation from high school merits the attention of educators because this decision will impact on the content of the curriculum and the evaluation of the achievement of students.

An examination of the opinions of the state department of public instruction officials toward competency-based examinations as a means of assessing minimal competencies deemed necessary for high school graduation will allow the investigator to project possible trends in

secondary education. It will also permit the writer to determine procedures, which have been employed by school districts, that have implemented minimum competency examinations in their programs.

Importance of Study

Attention has been focused nationally on basic skills testing as a means to insure that high school students receive adequate instruction in what is commonly referred to as "the basics". The belief that schools no longer adequately educate the students prompted the use of basic skills testing.

Much disagreement exists concerning the usefulness of these tests. Many concerned individuals, i.e. educators, administrators, question the utilization of such exams. The writer of this paper judged that before accepting or rejecting the use of competency exams, it would be helpful to examine some of the arguments that are used to defend or reject basic skill competency tests and to determine the opinions of officials of state departments of public instruction toward competency-based examinations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of state departments of public instruction officials toward utilizing minimum competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation. The study also examined procedures used to implement a competency testing program.

Research Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

1. What are the opinions of state department of public instruction officials concerning the utilization of minimum competency examinations as one of the criteria for high school graduation?
2. What procedures and processes are employed by state department of public instruction officials in states that have implemented some form of a minimum competency requirement?

Assumptions

For the purpose of the study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The respondents chosen were appropriate representatives of the departments of public instruction being surveyed;
2. The questionnaires were answered truthfully by the respondents; and,
3. The questionnaire was a reliable and valid instrument.

Limitations

1. The literature examined was limited to that which dealt mainly with the use of basic skill competency examinations as a requirement for graduation from high school.
2. The survey of the state department of public instruction officials represented a small percentage of the educators involved in the controversy of competency testing and their opinions may not reflect a national professional opinion.

Explanation of Terms

Basic skill/competency tests - examinations which are designed to assess the educational achievement or advancement of a student in reading, writing, and calculating skills. These tests are usually criterion referenced tests and, at the time of this study, were being used to set minimal competency standards that must be achieved before a student may graduate from high school.

Criterion referenced tests - tests "deliberately constructed to yield measures that are directly interpretable in terms of specified performance standards" (Glaser and Nitko, 1971).

Department of public instruction - any primary state education agency that governs all the individual school districts throughout that state. Various names are used to refer to these agencies, but this term shall be used to designate all of these agencies regardless of their proper title.

Department of public instruction officials - the term used to represent all of the elected and appointed leaders of the agencies described above.

Minimum competency tests - examinations that assess student achievement in specified areas of the curriculum. A minimum standard of achievement must be met before students are certified competent in the content areas covered in the test. The abbreviation MCT will be used in this paper to denote this term.

Minimum competency testing programs - programs in schools that emphasize the use of minimum competency tests as a means to assess

the achievement of their students. These programs can be used to set minimum standards that must be met before a student is granted a high school diploma. The abbreviation MCTP will be used in this paper to denote this term.

Special education student - students that either for physical, mental, emotional, or social reasons "deviate from the relatively homogeneous groups of so called 'normal' pupils that the standard curriculum is not suitable for their educational needs" (Good, 1973). Special classes and facilities are usually present for these students to help them meet their instructional and physical needs in a school.

Organization of Paper

This paper is organized into five chapters and a selected bibliography. Chapter I is composed of the introduction, statement of the problem, need for the study and the explanation of terms.

Chapter II is a review of related literature, while Chapter III consists of procedures employed to conduct the investigation. Chapter IV reports the findings and Chapter V is the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The use of minimum competency tests as a means of assessing academic achievement is not a recent development in the field of education. Ebel (1978) reported that early in this century rural eighth grade students were required to take competency tests to determine whether they should be admitted into a town's high school. For decades most schools of medicine, dentistry, law and accounting have used minimum competency tests as one of the criteria that must be successfully met in order to be certified in those fields.

In recent years minimum competency testing has gained the attention of public high school administrators and educators. Due to accountability and back-to-the-basics movements of the early 1970's, this form of testing has re-emerged, not from the demands of teachers and school administrators, but from parents, employers, and the general public. As parents and employers began to voice their disappointments in public education, legislators responded to demands from advocates of accountability. According to Nickse and McClure (1981), minimum competency testing became "the quality control device in response to public pressure" (p. 176).

The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of state department of public instruction officials toward utilizing minimum

competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation. This study also examined procedures used to implement a competency testing program. The review of related literature focuses upon the following topics: a perceived need for accountability; characteristics of minimum competency testing programs; assumptions about minimum competency testing; problems associated with minimum competency testing; and selected samples of programs which utilize minimum competency tests.

Background

Carver (1977) reported that beginning with the early 1970's parents and employers began to voice their disappointment in the product of public education: the high school graduate. The accountability movement was born. The accountability movement was started by individuals who demanded that public schools be more effective educational institutions.

Proponents of accountability noted that a significant number of high school graduates were functionally illiterate, unable to compute mathematically and/or severely lacking in oral and written communication skills. Further evidence of ineffective education in public secondary education was the widely reported declining scores of high school seniors on the Scholastic Achievement Tests (SAT). Armed with tangible and intangible information pertaining to the cognitive performance of public high school graduates, the accountability movement began to demand that high schools throughout this country become more responsible for the end product of public education: the high school graduate.

Some of the evidence presented by proponents of the accountability movement resulted in endless arguments by educators; however, one issue that could not be ignored was that of declining SAT scores. For the past fourteen years SAT scores have dropped consistently. In 1963 the average verbal score was 478 and the average math score was 502. By 1976 the scores had declined to an average of 429 in the verbal portion and 470 in the math portion of the SAT. This is a ten percent and six percent decline respectively (Kinder, 1980, p. 173).

Venable (1981) stated that the decline in SAT scores was a definite problem that could not be ignored. He cited the following four possible reasons:

1. The use of drugs by students which can sap their motivation;
2. The integration of ethnic minorities into the school;
3. Teacher participation in collective bargaining and negotiation which has led to instructors being less devoted to education;
4. The humanistic movement in education.

Venable reported that the increase in drug use among student populations in high schools escalated during the years that the SAT scores have been utilized as predictors of future academic success. Additionally, ethnic minorities are sometimes ill-prepared to learn in a middle class-white dominated school. Because they are less test-motivated than their white counterparts, the means of their test scores are likely to be lower.

Venable further suggested that the increasing demands of public school teachers, through collective bargaining and subsequent negotiation efforts, have shifted the interests and the motives of classroom teachers away from the "traditional view of the teacher as a dedicated scholar who views the transmission of knowledge, understandings, and attitudes as his or her major task" (p. 445).

Lastly, the impact the humanistic education movement was cited by Venable as a possible reason for the decline in SAT scores. The humanistic movement which emphasizes the individual child's development and permits that child to set "his or her own goals, free of the restrictions of preset, societal determined objectives," (p. 445) has resulted in the decline of scores because student goals may not effectively match the content of the SAT.

Other reasons have been cited for the dramatic decline of SAT scores. Bracey (1978) reported that increased television viewing might be one of the reasons for declining scores, while Ogden (1979) emphasized the curricular changes that have dominated public schools during this era. Walker and Schaffarzick (1974) supported the view that curricular changes have contributed to the decline. In a review of curriculum projects started in 1957, they observed that these projects de-emphasized traditional subject matter in the curriculum.

Proposed Solutions for Declining SAT Scores

A number of solutions have been proposed to remedy the declining SAT scores and the general dissatisfaction expressed by parents and employers with public education. These suggestions vary from general recommendations to specific mandates. A prevalent theme that one hears frequently centers on the desire to include a test as a means of evaluating whether a student should be awarded a high school diploma. This posture is not without controversy.

National Assessment

National assessment has been proposed as a solution to the declining performance of students on standardized tests. The Gallup Poll published annually in the Phi Delta Kappan (1979) reported that 65 percent of votes favored nationwide examinations for high school students. This view has not escaped the attention of national leaders including Congressman Ronald M. Mottl (D-Ohio) who introduced legislation to establish a national education proficiency test. This test would be given to all students in grades six, eight, ten, and twelve, and would evaluate skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Cawelti (1978) argued that the use of such a national competency test would do little to solve the problems of public schools. He stated that currently there are enough national achievement tests already in use to inform professionals whether or not students are learning. He suggested that an efficient use of the federal funds needed to implement this program would be the establishment of "effective inservice development for teachers, supervisors, and administrators, (which) would undoubtedly do more to help improve the schools" (p. 620).

Accountable Schools

The need for more rigorous educational practices is cited as one way to bring the SAT scores back up to pre 1960's levels. Minimum competency testing (MCT) has usually been the typical response. This logic of using MCT to establish what are the basic skills and having teachers teach their students these skills to raise SAT scores was questioned by Farr and Olshavsky.

Farr and Olshavsky (1980) saw MCT and SAT as different levels of achievement measurement. The decline in the verbal portion of the SAT is usually heeded as a sign that literacy in the United States is dropping. However, Farr and Olshavsky cited reports by the National Assessment of Educational Progress that state that minimal literacy rates are actually higher than they have been in the past for youth at the time of this study. They believe that the idea of using MCT to raise SAT scores evolved according to the following logic:

Tests are designed to assess the goals that have been established for students' reading achievement; students performance on SAT tests is declining; schools are responsible for teaching reading; therefore, something must be wrong with what the schools are doing (p. 528).

Farr and Olshavsky concluded that because SAT measure advanced skills and minimum competency tests the basic survival skills, the use of MCT will not improve the SAT scores.

Minimum competency tests not only have been used as a panacea for declining SAT scores, but also have been a means to make teachers, schools, and students accountable for their actions. The movement for making schools accountable is closely related to MCT because each emphasizes the measurement of student outcomes to demonstrate progress in learning.

McWilliams and Thomas (1976) described how a school can pre- and post-test students to demonstrate what educational progress has been made. By empirically describing the change in scores, the school can be held accountable.

Carter (1979) cited Melvin and Braskamp who suggested that the practice of testing and measuring to establish accountability has been

"borrowed from business, with the filling out of forms to be submitted to faceless bureaucrats, and with societal suspicions that education needs more control and supervision to become more (effective)" (p. 3). Similarly, according to Silberman (1977) "taxpayers who provide the money . . . want to know whether the dollars contributed to successful learning" (p. 28). In using MCT to demonstrate school accountability problems can arise.

One area of concern is the fear on the part of teachers that somehow a student's failure will be their responsibility. Silberman (1977) stated that "some of the most anxiety ridden teachers and some of the narrowest programs" (p. 28) result when the principles of accountability are imposed. The Ropers (1979) however, view accountable programs as one means to weed out the deadwood in both school curriculum and instruction. "Only classes (and ultimately teachers) that establish a reputation for competence will survive" (p. 527). Whether one agrees or disagrees with the principle of accountability, Cox (1977) points out that it is important to classify responsibilities of teaching to enable school professionals to be judged fairly by their peers and students.

In order for schools to be properly accountable, Cox (quoting Broudy) delineated what conditions must be met:

1. The special function of the school is clearly identifiable and agreed upon;
2. The outcomes for which the school is held accountable are well within its control;
3. There can be agreement on or acceptance by the public of some common body of teachable knowledge, skill, and value that all children within the educable range at school can be expected to study;

4. The standards for quality are clear, either in the forms of instructional tests for specific segments of instruction or in the form of standards within recognized domains of knowledge, as determined by experts in those domains;
5. The members of a profession are recognized as experts--whether teachers or administrators--in various special aspects of the educative process;
6. There is some consensus on educational theory--at least with respect to terminology, topics, for study and methods of inquiry. (Cox, 1977, p. 763)

These same conditions are in many respects the focal point of the debate of whether or not minimum competency tests should be used to determine high school graduation.

Minimum Competency Testing

The need to assess academic performance of individuals receiving high school diplomas resulted in the implementation of competency based education and minimum competency testing in some states. Prior to January 1, 1977 only seven states mandated such programs. By January 1, 1980, 38 states had passed some type of legislation or regulation to adopt minimum competency testing. Of these 38, 18 states required students to pass MCT as a requirement for high school graduation (Dearman & Plisko, 1980).

Competency based education has been used to describe many varieties of learning, and debate continues concerning the exact meaning of competency-based education. Goldhammer and Weitzel (1981) stated that "performance-based learning, mastery learning, proficiency, accountability, efficiency, equity of outcomes, basics, generic skills, criterion-referenced testing, and minimal competency testing" (p. 45) have been used to describe competency based education. Minimum

competency testing was seen as the "quality control device" in response to the public demand that evidence be supplied to prove that schools (educators) did teach. As Thomson (1981) stated, "the public . . . was not in an experimental mood about schools given the questionable outcomes or many innovations of the late 1960's and early 1970's" (p. 180).

Marion (1979) stated that minimum competency testing was designed to address two concerns: "1) assessing students with deficiencies, 2) instilling that the high school diploma regain(ed) significant meaning" (p. 3). Competency testing was not viewed as a way to deprive students of receiving a high school diploma, but as a way to help insure that students learned the "basics". Wise (1978) summarized the logic used to justify MCT:

1. Schools are not producing well;
2. An invention appears that is said to improve schooling;
3. State law embodying that invention is passed;
4. As required by law, schools will produce. (p. 596)

Characteristics of Minimum Competency Testing Programs

Each state employs competency based testing in a unique way; however, upon examination of competency testing programs, certain characteristics emerged. Moore, Memory, and Seaton (1979) reported the following observations:

1. A characteristic that is shared by all state programs is that while state-level governing bodies are requiring competency testing, the implementation of the program seems to be tied to the type of central state education agency in each state.

If the state has a strong centralized education policy, the state normally controls and implements the testing program; if the state education agency is decentralized, then the local districts usually control the program.

2. The use of minimum competency tests is often added to existing requirements for graduation.

Only Florida and California have made provisions for early exit based primarily on minimum competency test performance.

3. Competency tests generally consist of basic reading, writing, and math skills. Only a small number of states attempt to measure "life skills".
4. "Functional everyday content taken from telephone directories, newspaper articles, employment application forms, and similar materials makes up the majority of test passages" (p. 281).
5. Criterion referenced tests are the most common form of testing format.
6. The school curriculum of a district changes once testing begins.

Pipho (1978, 59) stated that remedial programs are usually implemented to meet the needs of student deficiencies.

7. All minimum competency testing programs have been implemented or imposed by state authority. States using minimum competency tests as a requirement for high school graduation are implemented by one of the following four types of mandates: 1) state standard, state test; 2) state standard, local test; 3) local standard, local test; and, 4) specific state requirements, district option to participate.

States vary in the procedures utilized to implement minimum competency testing, but they share the above characteristics when minimum competency testing is employed.

Assumptions About Minimum Competency Tests

The general public and state legislators have embraced minimum competency testing as an educational policy to assess academic cognitive achievement of high school graduates. Fremer (1978) stated that the general goal of all competency programs is to insure that students can function successfully both in and out of school. Piphio (1978) concurred that the emphasis has been on the life skills but questioned whether any school program has adequately addressed the problem of the relationship that exists between school and job skills. The assumption is that good school performance will translate into good job skills.

Another assumption of advocates of minimum competency testing is that the implementation of these tests will end the policy of social promotion and restore credibility to the recipients of high school diplomas. Henson (1980) articulated this concern when he stated that:

Most of the proponents of the movement perceive the main purpose of schools as instructional and hope the minimum competency tests will put an end to social promotion and will stop the graduating of functional illiterates. (p. 59)

Further, Hart (1978) expanded on the ills of social promotion and stated that:

It is important to tell students what we expect of them and what the consequences are if they do not meet these expectations. To do otherwise in the area of proficiency standards is to continue to award diplomas that mean little to students, parents, educators, and employers. (p. 594)

Cawelti (1981) suggested that denying social promotion could be a device to motivate students to achieve.

Wise (1979) reported that the demand for minimum competency testing programs was based upon the following four assumptions:

- 1) operationalizing the goals of education will make them attainable,
- 2) measuring the outcomes improves education,
- 3) teachers can change their teaching techniques in a short amount of time,
- 4) current education is not practical.

Proponents defend the use of minimum competency tests as a means of improving education. Henson (1980) suggested that opposition to minimum competency testing will be opposed by those who see schooling as being more than just instruction in the basic skills. "(They) believe that the school is responsible for the development of the whole person, thus equipping each student with vocation and social skills" (p. 59). Opponents believe that the skills tested should not be the main focus of the educational process.

Issues Associated with Minimum Competency Testing

Although many states have adopted or approved the concept of utilizing minimum competency examinations as a means of measuring academic performance of high school students, certain issues continue to recur. These issues include identifying skills that are considered essential for life, selecting tests to measure these competencies, determining minimal competence, and legal implications of a minimum competency testing program. Agreement on these issues has not been unilateral. Much controversy continues to surround these issues.

Identifying minimum competencies. An article in the American School Board Journal (1977) stressed that the toughest task of establishing a minimum competency program is determining the basic goals of the school district and agreeing upon performance levels needed to achieve these goals. Reys (1977) emphasized the difficulty of this task when he stated that

Few people seem to appreciate the complexity of the task of identifying basic skills in mathematics and of subsequent problems of assessment. (p. 8)

In addition, Hart (1978) reported it took about three years of research to develop the curriculum and testing goals for one high school English program.

Identifying minimum competencies expected of high school graduates is further complicated by the task of distinguishing school skills and their relationship to life skills. Brickell (1978) stated that there are two main areas of competency: school skills and life skills. School or basic skills are those skills which are needed to achieve academic success in reading, writing, and computing. Life skills are those needed to function as an adult such as filling out an income tax form or job application. Because of this difference in competencies, Brickell suggested that the MCT to be designed should indicate readiness for advancement in school and for life. Additionally Fremer and Dwyer (1977) noted that defining competencies also involved three considerations: 1) external requirements of other institutions such as a department of public instruction or the state legislature, 2) the goals of the individual school districts, 3) the personal development goals of the student.

It is assumed that once minimum competencies are defined, a basic education program can be designed to meet these goals. Monk (1977) disagreed with the implication that there is one method to achieve competence when he stated that "what one individual needs and/or is able to accomplish is unique unto him" (p. 28). He further argued that the academic skills necessary for success in life are not defined, nor what is considered success. Coombs (1979) in trying to identify what are the real basics that should be included in a MCT program stated that focusing on the traditional minimums in reading, writing, and math are insufficient.

The achievements that are basic to adequate functioning as an adult person are those which are necessary to recognizing and exercising ones' rights, and those which are necessary to recognizing and fulfilling ones' responsibilities. (p. 179)

These minimums are directed at a student's ability to think rationally and Coombs has little faith that such minimums could be adequately measured in a MCTP.

This lack of consensus on what are the minimum competencies that are required for successful living is reflected in Reys' (1977) statement that the

Development of such tests rests on the fallacious assumption that there exists a well defined set of basic . . . skills that every citizen needs in order to function effectively in society. (p. 8)

The testing for just basic skills is feared because of its implications for other academic subject areas. Bracey (1978) voiced his concern when he stated that

The narrow definition of 'minimum competencies' and 'back to basics' will once again accentuate that earlier trend of excellence. The kind of excellence promoted by schools in that narrow excellence that is loosely termed 'left brained'--logical, sequential, verbal, analytic. (p. 551)

Critical thinking and exploration would be curtailed and, as an article in the New Jersey Educational Association Review (1980) suggested, curriculum would become much narrower. The social sciences are seen as being particularly hurt if MCT are adopted.

Another fear regarding the identification of minimum competencies concerns who will set the goals to be achieved. Piphon (1978) and Levenson (1979) warned against the establishment of these goals by a minimal number of educators. They stressed the importance of obtaining as much cooperation as possible from educators, parents, and students to insure that the minimum competencies that are chosen are satisfactory to all. Glass (1978) cautioned educators to be concerned with the many problems of identifying minimum competencies in the following statement.

Teachers and their consultants attempting to define 'competencies' and writing test items intended to reflect minimum levels of acquisition are engaged in a bootless and potentially embarrassing endeavor. They are likely to construct a competency based test for graduation that is quite inappropriately difficult. Then they will be forced to back off and will be accused publicly of either not knowing what students ought to know or else not teaching students what they ought to learn. They are, in fact, guilty of neither count. No one knows how well a person must read to succeed in life or what percentage of the graduating class ought to be able to calculate compound interest payments. (p. 603)

Educators have stated that any school system or state that is contemplating the establishment of a MCT program must be aware of the complexity of setting minimum standards for their program. Although a difficult task, these educators must be prepared to justify adequately the goals they have set.

Testing for minimum competence. There are many ways to measure or assess competencies that students may possess. Traditionally examinations

to determine grades have been standard operating procedure in a majority of high schools in the United States. Because tests, especially criterion-referenced tests, are now being used in many MCT programs to determine eligibility to graduate from high school, educators and other professionals are now taking a closer look at the appropriateness of this procedure.

Brickell (1978) described four ways minimum competencies can be measured: 1) test questions can be actual performance settings that may occur later on in employment or college situations, 2) test questions can be simulated performance situations which are designed to mimic the real settings of work or school, 3) test questions can be measures of school performance skills such as essays and paintings, 4) test questions can be paper pencil tests that measure a narrow base of knowledge and skills. As one moves from the actual situation to the paper pencil technique the process of testing will become easier and less expensive, but the results are less likely to predict success.

The most common form of MCT seems to be criterion-referenced examinations. Clark and Thompson (1976) reported that many educators felt that criterion-referenced tests were fair and democratic measures. Others are not so sure.

Nathan and Jennings (1978) reported that research indicates that there is "no correlation between high scores on any type of standardized paper pencil test and adult success" (p. 623). Furthermore Shepard (1980) stated that criterion-referenced tests are valid for use in regular classroom measurement, but this same technology "is inadequate for certification of high school graduates" (p. 74). Thus it is argued

that minimum competency testing programs that use criterion-referenced tests are poor models for the measuring of later performance of life tasks. Spady and Mitchell (1977) reported that because life skills are usually determined locally, the use of criterion-referenced tests that are not developed locally would not be a proper assessment of those skills.

Another weakness of minimum competency tests are that they do not pinpoint where teaching is needed. Applebaum (1979) stated that there is a great temptation to use competency tests as a diagnostic instrument for remedial programs.

The test is, at best, a general screening device used to detect, with non-zero probability or error, who is in need of remedial training. It in no proper way specifies the exact form of remediation needed nor does it detect specific weaknesses. (p. 189)

Assuming that minimum competencies can be agreed upon, Taylor and Krakow (1977) pointed out that there are assumptions that must be made concerning the use of standardized tests: assume that all Americans have a common set of values (otherwise instrument bias); assume that national assessment (or local) can establish goals and objectives that meet the needs of the nation's entire population; assume that there is a common body of knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be mastered by each student for each subject area and at each level and that these can be assessed. Even if these assumptions can be adequately incorporated into the design of an instrument, others point out that with so much emphasis placed on helping students pass these tests, their instruction will be limited to teaching toward passing these tests.

Rubin (1979) indicated that teachers already teach toward tests. He stated "there is nothing wrong with teaching to tests provided the tests are well conceived, evaluated properly, and centered on useful educational aims" (p. 540). By using the goals and objectives of the MCT it is also argued that this can increase the teacher's teaching abilities because of the focus it can give to instruction. This raises the fear among teachers that a high number of failures from their students may be used to evaluate their performance. Henson (1980) stated that

The potential damage does not lie in the tests themselves or in the decision to test, but rather in how the test scores are used. (p. 59)

The problem of setting the minimum standard needed to be achieved by all students has not been fully resolved. Brickell (1978) mentioned two ways to set standards: a single standard, or a guaranteed standard on a sliding scale. The single standard may be difficult for the slower student, and yet too simplistic for the bright student. The graduated scale determined by ability might solve some of the problems; a low standard for low ability student(s), and a higher standard(s) for the higher ability student(s).

Another factor in establishing minimum standards is that standards vary from state to state; therefore what might be considered passing in one state may be a failure in another.

Agreement does exist that the minimum standard established must be difficult enough to bring validity to its use. Reys (1977) stated that

unless tests of minimum competence really have some teeth in them, many people will be in for a rude awakening when they find students who have passed the tests but still exhibit some embarrassing weaknesses in . . . basic skills. (p. 9)

To decide how high the minimum competencies will be set, Brickell (1978) advocated an actual test based on performance of successful adults. After this survey is completed, an acceptable failure rate could be agreed upon.

Readance and Moore (1979) cautioned that setting the standard too high may penalize students for their natural range of abilities. No matter how strict or lax the standard may be, there will always be a certain percentage of students that it will discriminate against.

There is also the implication that the minimum will become the maximum. Levenson (1979) stressed that teachers have to become aware of this possibility to ensure that the students strive beyond the minimum level of achievement.

For those students who do not pass the minimum competency test, a certificate of attendance or modified diploma is awarded. These diplomas indicate that the student has completed the credit requirements of the school or state, but were unable to pass the competency examination. Provisions enabling the student to retake the test are made and a student is allowed to receive a regular diploma in the event that the test is passed. Carter (1979) quoted Wise concerning the negative effects of such a procedure.

Those who fail will receive a 'certificate of attendance' rather than a high school diploma. The stigma which they will bear will be worse than that borne by those who drop out of school for their incompetence will have been certified. Indeed because minimum (competency) testing does nothing to improve either teaching or learning, we may be sure that one result will be to hold the student responsible for the failure of the educational system. (p. 337)

Usually adequate remediation is available to students who are assessed incompetent. Piphon (1978, 67) forewarned the necessity of new

remedial programs for those students who failed to meet the mastery level. He noted that because of this additional need, schools could have a tendency to change their curriculum to meet the content requirements of the MCT program. This, he noted, could result in a narrowing of the curriculum in some school districts. Anderson and Lesser (1978) reported that the cost of establishing and maintaining these remedial programs may be beyond the means of many school districts.

Legal considerations related to minimum competency testing.

Problems of testing and designing MCT are varied and difficult to solve. The reality that competency tests are being used and their results to deny high school diplomas has generated a number of legal questions concerning this practice.

Minimum competency testing programs for high school graduation typically are implemented due to legislative endeavors at the State level, or by school board policy decisions. In either case, because these programs are in effect laws, they are subject to challenges and interpretation in the courts. Nationally, Congressman Ronald Mottl (D-Ohio) tried to introduce a nationwide competency law (Bill HR 9574). An impetus for such laws can be traced to a suit filed in California courts in which an 18 year old charged the school district that it was acting negligently and misrepresented him which resulted in the breach of statutory duties, and constitutional deprivation to a right to an education (Saretsky, 1973). With the rate that competency testing programs are being adopted, many see numerous court challenges that may ultimately be decided by the Supreme Court. Since Florida was one of the first states to undergo court battle in defense of its competency

program, attention will be focused on the decisions that the courts handed down, and their implications for other state programs.

In the suit brought against the Florida Department of Public Instruction (Debra P. v. Turlington) the issues were, 1) minimum competency tests were not properly implemented, and 2) they were racially discriminatory. Blacks failed the test at a disproportionately high rate. Of the student population that were black and taking the test, 78 percent failed compared to 25 percent of their white peers (Lewis, 1979) although blacks only represented 1/5th of the population in Florida public schools. In handing down its decision the appellate court ruled that these tests

may not deprive its high school seniors of the economic and educational benefits of a high school diploma until it has demonstrated that the (minimum competency) test is a fair test of that which is taught in its classroom and that the racially discriminatory impact (of the test) is not due to educational deprivation. (Pullin, 1981, p. 21)

The instruction must match the test objectives which must precede the administration of the test. This decision delayed the use of competency testing to determine high school graduation in Florida until the 1982-83 school year. Fisher (1978) developed a complete description of the Florida competency law as it was originally written.

To avoid such court cases and to show the implications that this decision has on educators, Down (1979) and Popham (1981) were in agreement with McClung (1978) who outlined certain procedures and considerations which should be incorporated in all minimum competency testing programs.

The Florida decision highlighted the fact that many minimum competency testing programs have inadequate phase-in periods between

the time they become law and the time of testing to receive a diploma.

McClung (1978) stated that

it is likely that many if not most of (the) students failing the test would have studied differently in earlier years had they been given notice--and teachers might have taught differently as well. (p. 397)

In order to avoid the issue of due process, one must seek what is considered a safe phase-in period. Florida courts did not set a specific requirement, but McClung (1978) implied that to be entirely safe, twelve years must be used to ensure that those students in the first grade will know that a test will be required in their eleventh or twelfth grade.

Problems arise if there is an inadequate test-instruction match. To be fair the test must match the instruction that has taken place. Pullin (1981) illustrated this match in the following statement.

For example, a student who has never seen a federal income tax form may well be so confused by it that he or she will be unable to demonstrate the basic ability to add, subtract, or divide. (p. 21)

In order to ensure that such an occurrence does not take place McClung (1978) suggests that the test must have both curriculum validity and instructional validity.

Curriculum validity "is a measure of how well test items represent the objectives of the curriculum" (p. 397). Instructional validity is a "measure of whether or not the school district's stated objectives were translated into topics and actually taught in the classroom" (p. 397).

If the two measures of validity are present and the student still fails the test, it should not be considered a reflection upon the school's ability to educate. McClung (1978) warns, however, if a

School system that cannot assure the curriculum and instructional validity of its competency tests should not use them as a basis for denying promotions or a diploma to any of its students. (p. 398)

Due process of the law would be violated and schools are subject to law suits if instruction does not match the content of the test.

Drawing from the above items and provisions concerning the legal implications of competency testing programs, McClung (1978) suggests that a model program would involve the following considerations: 1) measure what is taught; 2) reflect all aspects of a pluralistic society; 3) lengthy phase-in; 4) provide for multiple learning, evaluation and remedial programs; and, 5) provide for students and educators to share responsibility for performance rather than place the full burden upon the student.

Selected Samples of Programs Which Utilize

Minimum Competency Tests

Each state is unique in the way in which it employs competency testing, but all have been adopted or imposed by state authority or local decisions. Implementation can be categorized into one of the following four types of mandates: 1) state standard, state test; 2) state standard, local test; 3) local standard, local test; and, 4) specific state requirements, district option to participate. An example of each mandate will be given along with a brief history of its implementation.

State Standard, State Test

The State of Florida typifies the state standard, state test policy of minimum competency tests for high school graduation. The roots for Florida's MCT date back to 1968 when the Florida legislators passed the Educational Accountability Act. This act allowed the commissioner of education to achieve greater quality in education in the State of Florida. The following year six goals were incorporated into this mandate:

1. The establishment of state educational objectives in priority order.
2. Provision of sound financial support.
3. Creation of minimum standards for achievement and quality controls.
4. Assistance to districts for evaluating results.
5. Creation of an information system.
6. Efficient use of funds. (State of Florida, Department of Education, 1976, p. 1)

Five years later, the 1976 legislature expanded this original law to include yearly assessment of students in grades three, five, eight, and eleven. It was under this expanded version that the ability to pass the minimum competency test became a requirement for high school graduation.

This examination is known as the State Student Assessment Test, Part II (SSAT-II). Because of the legal challenge made regarding the use of this test, full implementation has been delayed until the 1982-83 school year. If a student fails to pass the SSAT-II after attempts in the junior and senior years, these students shall receive a certificate of completion. Students may then pursue a regular high school diploma through various adult education programs. The tests are designed to

measure functional literacy in mathematics and communication skills. The minimum competency tests are continuing in Florida schools in an effort to refine the testing process; however, the results of these tests will not be used to determine high school graduation until the 1982-83 school year.

State Standard, Local Test

The State of California follows the state standard, local test format. The California pupil proficiency law requires that the skills to be tested and the levels of performance required for passing must be determined by each district. Each district must set separate passing scores for each of the general areas of reading, written expression, and computation, thus eliminating the chance that students' combined score in all sections would enable them to receive a passing average. The California program first began in 1975 but the passing of the proficiency test did not become a requirement for high school students until after June, 1980.

Local school districts must also assess students in the lower grades. "Assessment must be conducted at least once in grades ten through eleven" (Chladek, 1980). The local districts also can use a variety of testing formats. Although most districts use paper pencil tests, other methods include:

1. Requiring the student to perform a task, such as making change or balancing a checkbook;
2. Using teacher's professional opinion about a student's abilities;
3. Evaluating students' work products, such as essays, artwork, and work on school projects.
(Proficiency Today, 1980, p. 1)

The role of the State Department of Education is that of providing technical assistance to districts in the form of a framework for assessing student proficiency. The department publishes a Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) that provides information on various assessment procedures. Also available is the Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM) which contains test questions and the specifications from which they were developed. The local district can also draw upon the personnel of the department of education for further help in developing its testing plan.

There is no statewide minimum competency test in California. Each of the state's local school districts must set its own standards and design and select its own assessment procedures.

Local Standard, Local Test

Oregon was the first state to adopt minimum competency requirements for its students. It employs the local standard, local test format. According to Marion (1979) Oregon has done more to involve local schools than any other state. In 1973, the Oregon State Department of Education reviewed high school graduate requirements because of the public's concern that high schools were not educating the students properly. As a result, Oregon adopted a rigid certification program. After a review of these standards, new standards were adopted on February 22, 1980, by the State Board of Education.

Each student must meet state credit requirements as well as demonstrate competence in reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, listening, and reasoning (Oregon Department of Education, 1980, p. 3).

Each school district is allowed to place a different emphasis in its curriculum to meet the needs and wants of the school district.

Each school district and its community should establish priorities among the goals to meet local needs, and allocate their resources accordingly. This process should provide each student with the opportunity to achieve the requirements for graduation from high school and as much additional schooling as school and community resources can provide. (Oregon Department of Education, 1980, p. viii)

The local standards developed are then incorporated into a competency test which is accepted as evidence that the school is in compliance with the overall state standards. The local districts have the option of employing other means to assess attainment of standards other than just minimum competency tests. Oregon basic competency requirements were adopted in 1972 and became effective in 1978. A careful record of the competencies is kept for each student from grade six to twelve. At each level, a specified set of standards are to be achieved. Failure to meet all requirements by grade twelve will result in students receiving a modified diploma or a certificate of attendance (Oregon Department of Education, Standard Guidelines, 1980, p. 3).

Specific State Requirements, District's Option to Participate

The last type of mandate is the option of the district to participate in minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation. This option is employed in Denver, Colorado, and in some Indiana school districts.

Denver has the distinction of being the first school district in the nation to employ competency tests as a criterion for high school graduation. Basic skills tests were first given in 1960 to seniors.

Currently its tests are first administered in the ninth grade and the testing project is called Proficiency and Review.

Denver's Proficiency and Review program uses the following procedure:

1. Initial testing of all students at a certain grade level;
2. A period of review or remedial work for those students who fail to attain the required level on one or more subtests;
3. Retesting with an alternate form of the test;
4. A repetition of the cycle for students who continue to fail. (Beal, 1978, p. 610)

The tests assess numerical skills, spelling, language and reading proficiency. The students are given numerous chances to master the test from grade nine to grade twelve. If a student does not successfully complete the examination at the end of grade twelve, a certificate of attendance is awarded. A pupil who receives this certificate can then return at any time to the Department of Development and Evaluation and take the test or subtests not passed. If successful, the student receives a diploma.

The State of Indiana Comprehensive Assessment and Program Planning System (CAPPS) takes a similar approach to competency testing. In 1978, the Commission on General Education of the State Board of Education passed CAPPS which was designed to improve education in Indiana. Emphasis was placed on local determination of standards, early diagnosis of students' needs, and improving educational programs to meet those needs.

Each school district formed an advisory committee which was responsible for reviewing and recommending local standards of educational performance. All districts include performance standards in

reading, composition, spelling, social studies, mathematics, and science. Progress in each of these categories is assessed in grades three, six, eight, and ten, but the state guidelines do not require a student to pass a minimum competency test in order to graduate from high school. This decision is an option of local school districts. "If a community decides it wishes students to pass a test before graduation, it may do so, but a test is not mandated by the state" (CAPPS-A Learning Map, 1980). The belief that local communities are best able to decide what their students' learning needs are is the intent behind the Indiana program.

The four types of statewide mandates of minimum competency tests were presented above. The first three (state standard, state test; state standard, local test; local standard, local test) require all school districts to use some type of competency testing. The fourth mandate (specific state requirements, district option to participate) allows school districts the option of using minimum competency tests to determine high school graduation.

Summary

The review of related literature included sections on background of the problem, proposed solutions for declining scores and minimum competency testing. The review of literature identified the need for additional assessment measures to evaluate high school students before awarding them high school diplomas. Various means of assessing cognitive abilities of high school students were reported. Issues related to the implementation of minimum competency exams in high schools were reviewed in this section.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine the opinions of state departments of public instruction officials toward the utilization of minimum competency examinations as one of the criteria for high school graduation. An additional purpose of the study was to determine procedures used to implement a minimum competency testing program.

The investigation of the problem involved the following procedures:

- 1) formulating the research hypotheses; 2) defining the population sample; 3) developing the questionnaire; 4) collecting the data; and
- 5) selecting the statistical design for the analysis of the data.

Research Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

1. What are the opinions of state department of public instruction officials concerning the utilization of minimum competency examinations as one of the criteria for high school graduation?

2. What procedures and processes are employed by state department of public instruction officials in states that have implemented some form of a minimum competency requirement?

Subject Selection

The Education Directory: State Educational Agency Officials, 1980 (Porter, 1980) was consulted to identify the current leader of each state's department of public instruction in the United States. They were the population for this study.

Development of the Questionnaire

After examining numerous questionnaires and reviewing the literature concerning competency testing as a criterion for high school graduation, the researcher developed a questionnaire. The items included in the questionnaire were culled from a review of the literature concerning competency testing, and input from the faculty of the Division of Teacher Education and other staff at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (see Appendix A). Selected state and local leaders provided suggestions, also.

The questionnaire consisted of 51 items (see Appendix B). The instrument was divided into three major parts: Part I was designed to provide general information about the official completing the survey and whether his/her state currently used or was going to adopt a competency testing program and; Part II was designed to provide information based upon the opinions held by these officials regarding the advantages or disadvantages of competency testing. The opinion statements were structured around the areas of accountability, the use of minimum competency tests, perceived dangers of minimum competency testing, implications for teachers, and the issue of discrimination.

Part III was designed to be completed by only those officials who represented states which were currently using competency testing programs as a requirement for high school graduation. This section was devoted to gathering general information about the nature of the competency testing program in the states using them. In all three sections of the questionnaire, the respondent was instructed to check the appropriate response or supply the information desired. The respondents were encouraged to comment on any particular item of the forced choice responses.

After the initial construction, the questionnaire was presented to the thesis committee chairman for preliminary approval. The draft was then distributed to the other members of the thesis committee to assist in the refinement of the instrument. Following their review, the questionnaire was revised and then individually submitted to three members of the Division of Teacher Education requesting that they review and comment on the structure and content of the questionnaire. The panel consisted of Mr. Fred Kusch, Division of Teacher Education, Dr. Larry Cozad, Director of the Office of Educational Services, and Mr. William Schmidt, Director of the Center for Education Professions. Each of these panel members were selected because of his involvement with teachers and administrators in the La Crosse area and have been vocal about minimum competency exams. After reviewing their comments and suggestions, the questionnaire was revised and submitted for final approval to the thesis committee. The questionnaire was then reproduced in its final form (see Appendix B).

Procedure

Copies of the questionnaire, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey (see Appendix C), and a self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to the 50 department of public instruction officials identified in the Education Directory: State Educational Agency Officials, 1980 (Porter, 1980). The commissioner or superintendent was instructed to complete the questionnaire or to refer it to an appropriate individual in his/her administration.

The questionnaires were mailed on August 6, 1981. By September 1, 1981, 37 questionnaires had been returned. A follow-up letter was sent on September 3, 1981, requesting those who had not returned their questionnaires to do so at their earliest convenience (see Appendix D). Forty-seven of the questionnaires, or 94 percent, were returned by October 1, 1981.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

Each response on the questionnaire was tabulated by hand and converted into percentages by the writer. A Chi Square (X^2) test was used for the statistical treatment of the data to determine if there were a significant difference at the .05 level between the expected and observed responses ($X^2 = 5.99$ at 2 d.f. and .05 level of confidence). The Yates Correction Factor, $\frac{(|f_o - f_e| - .5)^2}{f_e}$, was incorporated into the Chi Square formula because some of the cells in the contingency tables contained less than ten responses. This correction factor is used to approximate more accurately a normal distribution

(Kushner and De Maio, 1980). All reporting of Chi Square values in this paper will take into account this correction factor. Tables were also used to clarify the data further.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of state department of public instruction officials toward utilizing minimum competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation. This study also examined procedures used to implement a competency-based educational program. This chapter will present the data and statistical treatment of that data collected from a questionnaire.

Subjects

The leaders of each of the fifty state departments of public instruction were identified and mailed a questionnaire, with a cover letter explaining the purpose of this study. A total of 48 questionnaires were received; 47 were complete enough to be included in this study, making a 94 percent rate of return for the total sample.

Results

The raw data collected in this study consisted of the summative scores of a questionnaire using nominal data. The responses for each of the questions were tabulated and converted into percentages. A Chi Square test of independence using the Yates Correction factor was used to determine if the larger variations in some percentages were significant at the .05 level.

The results of this study will be discussed according to the sequential order in which the items appeared in the questionnaire. Part I of the questionnaire was designed to collect general information about the official completing the survey and whether his/her state has or is considering adopting an MCTP. Part II was designed to collect information regarding opinions on MCT held by respondents. Part III was intended to collect information regarding competency testing policy in those states which used competency testing programs as a criterion for high school graduation.

Part I: General Information

Of the 47 questionnaires returned, fifteen were completed by the state superintendent/commissioner of education, eight were completed by the deputy/assistant superintendent, twelve were completed by directors of evaluation and testing, six were completed by directors of basic skills/general education curriculum, and five were completed by other curriculum directors. Respondents surveyed included nine elected officials and thirty-six appointed officials. Two respondents did not indicate whether they were elected or appointed.

Competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation were in use in 16 states, whereas 31 states indicated that an MCT was not required. Fifteen of these sixteen states had statewide mandates. One state indicated it was a local option to administer competency tests as a requirement for high school graduation. Table 1 identifies the lengths of time various competency programs have been in use.

Table 1
Number of Years MCTP Have Been in Use

Years of Use	Number Responding
1 Year or Less	3
2 Years	1
3 Years	2
4 Years	7
5 Years	1
More than 5 Years	2

Of those states that did not have MCTP, nineteen had no plans to implement a program in the future. Two states indicated that legislation recently passed will require some type of MCT program.

Part II: Opinions of Competency Testing

Items 8 through 11 of this section presented statements in the general area of how MCT relates to the issue of accountability in education. Table 2 displays the percentages for the responses of items 8, 9, and 10.

From these items, there appears to be general agreement that minimum competency requirements respond to a lack of confidence in schools' ability to educate, and to ensure that a high school diploma has renewed meaning. In states with minimum competency programs, 43.8 percent agreed that MCT will ensure that students have "basic life" skills, whereas only 3.2 percent of the respondents from states that do not have MCT believe these programs will ensure these skills. A Chi Square test of independence showed that this difference was significant at the .05 level ($\chi^2 = 11.346$ at 2 d.f.).

Table 2

Response Percentages for Items #8, #9, #10

	Use of MCT as a result of lack of confidence in the school's ability to educate	Use of MCT to ensure the diploma has renewed meaning	Use of MCT will ensure that students will have the basic "life skills" to succeed
Total			
Agree	78.7%	85.1%	17.0%
Disagree	14.9%	14.9%	63.8%
Undecided	6.4%	0%	19.1%
States with MCT Programs			
Agree	81.3%	93.7%	43.8%
Disagree	18.7%	6.3%	31.2%
Undecided	0%	0%	25.0%
States without MCT Programs			
Agree	77.4%	80.6%	3.2%
Disagree	12.9%	19.4%	80.6%
Undecided	9.7%	0%	16.1%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

Item 11 asked respondents to check the response they felt should be examined if a particularly high number of students failed an MCT. The most popular response was the open category of "other" (42.6%). A majority of respondents listed all of the categories as factors to meet minimum competency standards. Of those respondents who chose one response, 40.4% indicated the response of school curriculum. The two least chosen responses were teacher performance and student performance with each receiving 10.6% of the responses.

The next three items in the questionnaire (12, 13, 14) were statements designed to measure how useful respondents felt MCT is for identifying educational strengths and weaknesses in students. Table 3 presents the distribution for these items.

A majority of the respondents agreed that MCTP can be useful in identifying problems in students early enough to allow time to design a course outline to enable the students to pass the test requirements. A difference of opinion appeared to emerge regarding the usefulness of an MCT to measure education growth. Only 28.7% of the respondents from states without MCTP agreed that such programs are useful to measure educational growth. The percentage rose to 75% from respondents in states that have MCTP. A Chi Square test demonstrated that this difference approached significance at the .05 level of confidence ($\chi^2 = 4.7$ at 2 d.f.).

Data for item 14 indicated that a majority of respondents (72.3%) do not agree that MCTP are useful in identifying the special education student. Comments written beside this item in the questionnaire revealed that some respondents felt other tests achieve this objective much better than an MCT.

Table 3

Response Percentages for Items #12, #13, #14

	MCT can identify problems in students early in their programs	MCT are useful for measuring educational growth in students	MCT are useful in detecting special education students
Total			
Agree	76.6%	51.1%	21.3%
Disagree	14.9%	38.3%	72.3%
Undecided	8.5%	8.5%	4.3%
States with MCT Programs			
Agree	81.3%	75.0%	25.0%
Disagree	12.5%	18.7%	75.0%
Undecided	6.2%	0%	0%
States without MCT Programs			
Agree	74.2%	38.7%	19.3%
Disagree	16.1%	48.4%	71.0%
Undecided	9.7%	12.9%	6.5%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

The perceived dangers of MCTP were subjects for items 15 through 21 of the questionnaire. Table 4 shows the distribution of the responses for items 15, 16, 18, and 19. These four statements focused upon implications of MCTP for students, teachers, and administrators.

A total of 59.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that an MCT encouraged students to attain only minimal standards. 81.3% of respondents from states using MCT programs disagreed, which was not significantly different from the 48.4% recorded for respondents from states not using MCTP.

Comments to item 16 indicated agreement with this statement for dissimilar reasons. Respondents from states using MCTP indicated that teachers and administrators do begin to teach toward the content in the competency test; then they added that such an emphasis is not a danger but a beneficial outgrowth of the program. Comments from respondents in states without MCTP agreed that this occurs, but viewed this trend negatively.

Some respondents agreed with the statement that MCTP stifle creativity in teachers; most did not view this as a danger of minimum competency programs. A majority of respondents also indicated that MCTP would not decrease the emphasis on most liberal arts and fine arts programs.

Items 17, 20, and 21 are presented in Table 5. These statements addressed the possible consequences of MCTP for local school districts.

The responses were split concerning local school boards losing some control over education; however, most participants agreed that there was some danger that a state's adoption of an MCTP could be used

Table 4

Response Percentages for Items #15, #16, #18, #19

	MCT encourage students to attain only minimal standards	MCT results in teachers and administrators teaching toward the tests	MCT stifle teacher creativity	MCT decrease the emphasis on liberal and fine arts programs
Total				
Agree	27.7%	78.7%	17.0%	38.3%
Disagree	59.6%	8.5%	72.3%	51.1%
Undecided	12.7%	8.5%	10.6%	10.6%
States with MCT Programs				
Agree	12.5%	81.25%	6.3%	18.7%
Disagree	81.3%	6.25%	93.7%	87.5%
Undecided	6.2%	6.25%	0%	6.3%
States without MCT Programs				
Agree	35.5%	77.4%	22.6%	48.4%
Disagree	48.4%	9.7%	61.3%	38.7%
Undecided	16.1%	9.7%	16.1%	12.9%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

Table 5

Response Percentages for Items #17, #20, #21

	MCTP result in local school districts losing some control over education	MCT could be used to demonstrate a school is not doing an adequate job	MCT usually do not reflect the individual goals of the local school board
Total			
Agree	44.7%	78.7%	40.4%
Disagree	48.9%	17.0%	38.3%
Undecided	2.1%	4.3%	17.0%
States with MCT Programs			
Agree	25.0%	62.5%	31.2%
Disagree	62.5%	37.5%	62.5%
Undecided	6.25%	0%	0%
States without MCT Programs			
Agree	54.8%	87.1%	45.2%
Disagree	41.9%	6.45%	25.8%
Undecided	0%	6.45%	25.8%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

to demonstrate that a particular school district was not doing an adequate job. Respondents from states that do not have MCTP see this possibility as a very real danger.

When asked whether statewide MCTP do not reflect the individual goals of the local school board, 45.2% of the respondents from states without MCTP agreed with this statement. Respondents from states that have MCTP disagreed. A Chi Square test revealed that this difference approached significance at the .05 level ($X^2 = 5.856$ at 2 d.f.).

Items 22, 23, 24, and 25 addressed the issues of what competency tests measure and whether or not all students could pass them. Because of the poor construction of items 22 and 23, the results for these two statements will be eliminated.¹ Table 6 presents the remaining items in the area of measurement issues.

Item 24 asked the respondents to consider who could pass a competency test. The majority of the respondents from states with MCT programs agreed that all students who wanted to could pass the test, but only 32.25% from respondents from states which do not have MCTP agreed with this. Table 6 also shows that there was some disagreement concerning whether an MCT can measure critical thinking and creativity, but the amount of disagreement was not significant at the .05 level.

Table 7 presents the distributions found for items 26 and 27, concerning the impact of MCTP on teachers and teaching. Item 26 addressed the fear that MCTP would be used to identify teachers as

¹These two items are "double barrelled" questions; respondents that checked the disagree answer present a problem in interpreting their intent. One cannot tell with which part of the items they were disagreeing. The totals are presented in Appendix B for those interested in the agree and undecided responses.

Table 6

Response Percentages for Items #24, #25

	With the exception of special education students, all students could pass a MCT if they really wanted to	A MCT cannot measure critical thinking and creativity
Total		
Agree	42.6%	57.4%
Disagree	31.9%	36.2%
Undecided	17.0%	4.3%
States with MCT Programs		
Agree	62.5%	37.5%
Disagree	31.2%	50.0%
Undecided	0%	6.25%
States without MCT Programs		
Agree	32.25%	67.7%
Disagree	32.25%	29.0%
Undecided	25.8%	3.3%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

Table 7

Response Percentages for Items #26, #27

	MCTP could be used to show that certain teachers are not performing adequately due to number of failures in their class	MCTP will result in teachers improving their teaching effectiveness
Total		
Agree	70.2%	38.3%
Disagree	19.1%	27.7%
Undecided	6.4%	13.9%
States with MCT Programs		
Agree	62.5%	62.5%
Disagree	31.2%	6.25%
Undecided	0%	25.0%
States without MCT Programs		
Agree	74.2%	25.8%
Disagree	12.9%	37.7%
Undecided	9.7%	35.5%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

inadequate on the basis of their number of failures. Of the 31 respondents from states not using MCTP, 74.2% agreed this was a danger. Responses from states using MCTP were almost as high. Perhaps others perceived this not as a danger but as a desirable benefit of the programs. Few respondents from states not using MCTP agreed that a MCT will improve teacher effectiveness, but the percentage was 62.5% from respondents in states using MCTP. This difference was significant when a Chi Square test was performed ($X^2 = 6.005$ at 2 d.f.).

The next two items (27, 28) dealt with discriminatory aspects of MCTP (see Table 8). Respondents from states with MCTP were split on the issue of denying students in special education a diploma if they do not pass a MCT. States without minimum competency programs disagreed 64.5%. This difference was found to be significant at the .05 level of confidence ($X^2 = 7.12$ at 2 d.f.). There appears to be a consensus among the respondents that the tests do not reflect a cultural bias, however, a Chi Square test demonstrated that the difference of responses from states using MCTP and states not using MCTP was significant at the .05 level ($X^2 = 6.68$ at 2 d.f.).

The last statement (item 30) dealt with a theory that has been suggested regarding why MCTP were implemented. None of the respondents from states using MCTP agreed with the statement that the theory behind MCTP appears to be that legislating goal attainment is sufficient for goal advancement to occur. 51.1% of respondents from states without MCTP agreed with the same statement. A Chi Square test demonstrated that this difference of opinion was not due to random chance ($X^2 = 13.803$ at 2 d.f., .05 level of confidence).

Table 8

Response Percentages for Items #28, #29

	Students in special education programs who do not pass a MCT should not receive a diploma	MCTP reflect cultural and language bias that favors white middle class students and handicaps non-white and/or lower class students
Total		
Agree	19.1%	17.0%
Disagree	57.4%	63.8%
Undecided	17.0%	19.1%
States with MCT Programs		
Agree	43.75%	0%
Disagree	43.75%	93.75%
Undecided	6.25%	6.25%
States without MCT Programs		
Agree	6.45%	25.8%
Disagree	64.5%	48.4%
Undecided	22.6%	25.8%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to no response by some officials.

Part III: States Using Minimum Competency Tests

Part III of the questionnaire gathered specific information about each state's MCTP. The data collected from 16 states responding is presented in Appendix E. Certain items, however, deserve special attention.

All respondents from the states participating in this section of the questionnaire indicated that students who fail competency tests have the opportunity to receive remedial help (item 39). To meet the needs of remediation caused by those tests, ten states found it necessary to create additional programs to help students; costs of programs were usually being shared by the state and local school districts. This information is important for those states considering the implementation of MCTP. Legislation requiring these tests should also include funding for remediation rather than placing the full burden on local school districts.

In examining the skills that the competency tests assess, it was not surprising to find that math, reading, and composition skills were included in almost all programs, but it was surprising that only two states specifically tested "life skills". Although math, reading, and writing are considered necessary skills for becoming successfully employed, the review of the literature indicated that many felt that other skills of living should also be included. Skills such as reading a map and filling out income tax returns were advocated, but the 16 states which have MCTP indicated that this is not the standard practice.

In response to the last item of the questionnaire, nine of the states responding indicated that the use of MCTP have improved the

performance of students in basic skills. This response was usually accompanied with a qualifier that it was too early to tell if in fact the tests have caused the increase in performance. Assessment programs by many states are underway to determine if there is a cause and effect relationship between the competency programs and measured performance.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the data which was gathered by the questionnaire sent to the 50 state departments of public instruction officials. Of the 47 responses, 31 did not use an MCT as a criterion for high school graduation, while 16 indicated that this was a requirement.

Part II of the questionnaire was presented in narrative and tabular form to highlight the similarities and differences that were found to exist among the responses. Selected information from Part III of the questionnaire was also presented. Discussion for all sections was limited to presentation of respondents' comments which helped to explain some of the distributions in responses.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of state departments of public instruction officials toward utilizing minimum competency examinations as a criterion for high school graduation. The study also examined procedures used to implement a competency testing program.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature included sections on background of the problem, proposed solutions for declining scores and minimum competency testing (MCT). The review of literature identified the need for additional assessment measures to evaluate high school students before awarding them high school diplomas. Issues related to the implementation of minimum competency exams in high school were reviewed. This review revealed that the use of MCT is one response to the accountability movement, but no consensus was found to exist concerning the appropriateness of this response.

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

1. What are the opinions of state department of public instruction officials concerning the utilization of minimum competency examinations as one of the criteria for high school graduation?

2. What procedures and processes are employed by state department of public instruction officials in states that have implemented some form of a minimum competency requirement?

Subject Selection

The Education Directory: State Educational Agency Officials, 1980 (Porter, 1980) was consulted to identify the current leader of each state's department of public instruction in the United States. They were the population for this study.

Development of the Questionnaire

A fifty-one item questionnaire was developed to survey the opinions of the state department of public instruction officials concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using MCT as a criterion for high school graduation. The instrument was divided into three major parts: Part I was designed to provide general information about the official completing the survey and whether or not his/her state currently used or was going to adopt a competency testing program; Part II was designed to provide information based upon opinion statements structured around areas of debate in the use of MCT; Part III was devoted to gathering information about the nature of competency testing programs in the states using them.

Collected Data

Forty-seven of the original fifty questionnaires that were sent out were received, producing a 94 percent rate of return. The officials' responses to each of the items on the questionnaire constituted the data for this report.

Analysis of the Data

Each response on the questionnaire was tabulated by hand and converted into percentages by the writer. A Chi Square test incorporating the Yates Correction Factor was used to determine if there were a significant difference at the .05 level between the expected and observed responses ($X^2 = 5.99$ at 2 d.f. and .05 level of confidence).

Conclusions

Overview of the Conclusions

This survey revealed that the overall opinions of state department of public instruction officials were similar concerning the majority of statements in the questionnaire. Conclusions about these similarities and differences will be presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

The majority of respondents concurred on the items concerning accountability. The conclusion that was reached was that these officials do believe that the current curriculum of education is not what is needed today. By agreeing that MCT will bring back renewed meaning to high school diplomas, the respondents seemed to be suggesting that current instructional practices have lost credibility. The school curriculum was identified as the most significant cause of poor performance by students. Therefore, this author concluded that these responses

demonstrated that a majority of officials believed that curriculum and instruction in public schools today is not adequately meeting the needs of students.

Disagreement existed concerning what skills were needed. Respondents from states employing MCT generally agreed that the skills included in their programs will ensure that students will have the basic "life skills" to succeed. Respondents from states not employing MCT disagreed resulting in a significant difference of opinion between the two groups. The author concluded that respondents from states using MCT were confident that the new emphasis on the minimum skills would restore confidence in public education. Respondents from states not employing MCT were not as confident that the inclusion of MCT was the only needed change.

No significant differences were found to exist between respondents concerning the usefulness of MCT. Therefore, although respondents may differ concerning the overall goals of minimum competency testing programs, both groups conceded that these tests were useful. It should be noted that respondents from states using the MCT and respondents from states not using minimum competency tests agreed that MCT are not particularly useful in detecting students with special education needs. The similarities in opinion regarding the dangers of employing MCT as a criterion for high school graduation revealed that the majority of the respondents believed that these programs were not as detrimental to public education as reported in the literature.

The respondents were divided in their concern that local school districts would lose some of its control over education as a result

of statewide minimum competency testing programs. Evidence of a clear majority of opinions did not emerge on the issue pertaining to this concern. This lack of consensus might be explained by the various structures of state departments of public instruction that existed in each of the states. If a department of public instruction's philosophy is one of highly centralized control of education, the loss of local control would not be of concern; whereas, the opposite would be true of departments of public instruction in states which believe in decentralization of education.

A majority of the respondents believed that MCTP would not affect liberal and fine arts programs. This indicated to the writer that MCTP would become an addition to existing school curricula rather than taking the place of other courses. Although MCT are perceived as a cost effective means to bring accountability to schools, adding more courses to a curriculum will increase a school's budget.

A particularly interesting finding was reported concerning the responses to the question of whether or not MCT can measure critical thinking and creativity. A majority of the respondents agreed that MCT cannot measure critical thinking and creativity. While respondents seemed to agree that these skills are important, the development of critical thinking and creativity may become less of a concern to departments of public instruction because it cannot be properly measured by minimum competency tests. Therefore, this author concluded that because of the current lack of tests which measure critical thinking, although desirable, it will be increasingly de-emphasized in the schools.

Both groups of respondents from states using and not using MCT agreed that there was a danger that test results could be used to show that teachers were not adequately instructing their students. The conclusion reached by the author to explain this similarity centers around the manner in which the results of these tests would be published. No one can predict the reactions patrons of the schools might have about a large number of student failures, and in an attempt to remove some of the blame from the children, the teacher could possibly become the scapegoat. Perhaps the respondents recognized the impact of these programs on measuring teacher competency.

Item 28 of the questionnaire dealt with the continuing debate about allowing special education students to receive a regular high school diploma without requiring them to pass a MCT. The author concluded that the divided results from respondents from states using MCT could indicate that perhaps some consideration is being given towards reducing the stigma that denying a diploma may have on the special education student. Clearly, respondents from states not using MCT believed that some consideration should be given to special education students.

None of the respondents from states using MCTP agreed with the statement that the theory behind minimum competency programs appears to be that legislating goal attainment is sufficient for goal advancement to occur; however, respondents from state departments of public instruction could once again lend some insight into this difference. If state departments of public instruction believe in highly centralized educational systems, local school districts may not resent mandates of a state's legislature which is also a centralized organization.

If the philosophy of decentralization of education is followed by state departments of public instruction, a similar intrusion by the legislature may be seen as an attempt to reverse its present rationale of a limited role by the state department of public instruction.

The use of programs of remediation for students who have failed the MCT was the typical response by states using these programs to help students achieve mastery. This author concluded that, assuming adequate instruction was available before the MCT was presented, the responsibility for failure lies with the student. This alters the point of view of looking at the curriculum and instruction as the causes for student failure. One of the goals of MCTP was to make the schools more accountable for students' failures; however, by offering instruction aimed at mastering the tests, the student may become more accountable for his/her test scores.

Summary of Conclusions and Comments

From analyzing the similarities and differences that were observed in this questionnaire, the following conclusions were made:

1. Respondents believed that current educational practice is inadequate and MCTP is one means to stop the decline in student and school performance. Disagreement exists concerning whether MCT are all that is needed to stop this decline;
2. MCTP were viewed as having some educational uses, but the measurement of educational growth was not one of them;
3. The role of state authorities is increasingly taking over evaluation responsibilities that were once the exclusive responsibility of local school districts;

4. The indication that liberal arts and fine arts programs were not being diminished pointed to the addition of MCTP to school curricula, but not at the expense of other programs;

5. Because current testing methods do not adequately measure critical thinking and creativity, there is a possibility that these skills will be less emphasized in minimum competency testing programs;

6. Improper reporting of test results could pose a danger to teachers if the scores are used as an indicator of teaching competency; and,

7. MCTP could tend to shift accountability of student failure from the school to the student.

These conclusions were based upon an analysis of the findings of the survey of state department of public instruction officials.

This author concurs with Resnick (1980) that minimum competency tests are partly a response to the perceived need for schools to become the responsible agent for finding employment for its students. A number of items in this survey demonstrated that a majority of officials who responded do not believe that current curricula have meaning, and that the professed testing of life skills is the center of competency programs. Resnick suggested that because of the recession that has been present in the United States since 1973, schools are now expected to produce students that are employed, not just employable.

This author also believes that research studies will prove that minimum competency tests do improve basic skills. These studies will be published in major newspapers and magazines, and the public will congratulate themselves on the wisdom of its demands. The question is

begged, however, if this should be the main focus of the school's curriculum.

Free public education was first implemented in the United States because of the value it has for a democratic state. It was reasoned that if democracy were to flourish, voters must be educated to the extent that would allow them to make rational decisions in evaluating government policy or campaign issues. In effect, what was being said was that a person unable to arrive at cogent decisions is of little value to a democratic state. Of course the basic skills are necessary for the process of making a decision, but these skills will only enable individuals to gather the information. Should not the skills to evaluate the worth of such information also be taught in our schools?

Decision-making becomes even more important in our modern society. Due to the pluralistic nature of society today, students are bombarded by cultural and value alternatives which require the ability to choose values rationally and to support them. The inculcation of the value of basic skills is perhaps acceptable, but do these skills also promote the other skills necessary in everyday life? For example, it is one thing to be able to read the directions of an income tax form and fill in numbers, but it takes a certain amount of creativity to be able to take advantage of all the possibilities that can be used to reduce the amount of income tax one has to pay.

Thus, the author does not question the potential of minimum competency testing programs to improve the basic skills tested, but wonders whether in the long run, such an emphasis is even wise for the intellectual development of the student and the advancement of

society. A dilemma such as this might not be properly addressed if the other more important aspects of education are continually de-emphasized.

Recommendations

From a review of the literature and responses received in the questionnaire, this author believes that certain procedures should be followed if other states are considering a program of minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation.

The development of a careful plan for reporting test scores to the public should be given high priority. This would probably require informational meetings for explaining test results. This could reduce the fear held by teachers and school district officials of having low test results being used as a means for evaluating them.

A more definite position should be taken on what the state's minimum competency testing program hopes to accomplish. Is it to improve basic skills, or help students prepare for daily living? It was reported that many states using minimum competency testing programs profess to help prepare youth for after school experiences but test only on the basic skills. The literature revealed that many educators do not believe that only the basic skills are adequate preparation for successful living.

It is important not to delude the public into believing that all students will be able to pass MCT with the proper preparation. Since a majority of states that currently use MCT employ criterion referenced tests, it is implicit in such a testing design that a certain percentage of students will never meet the set standards. If the parents accept

this fact, then protests concerning why their children have failed should be reduced.

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142 mandating the mainstreaming of special needs students, some type of arrangement should be made to recognize the accomplishments of such students who may not be able to complete successfully a minimum competency test. The stigma that this law aimed to reduce will have been defeated if the special education student is systematically denied a regular high school diploma because of the inability to pass a competency test.

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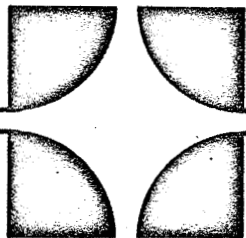
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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO STAFF MEMBERS



University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

(608) 785-8000

June 22, 1981

Dear

As you know, the issue of competency testing is currently being introduced in Wisconsin by both Herbert Grover and Paul Offner. Under this legislation competency tests would be required to be completed by all high school students in order to be able to receive a diploma. This area of education is continually occupying more space in the media and our professional journals.

Working with the cooperation of Dr. Altman, I am designing a survey questionnaire which will be sent to the various department of public instruction officials throughout the United States. The questionnaire is designed to measure the pros and cons concerning the use of competency examinations as a requirement for graduation from high school.

Dr. Altman suggested that it would be very helpful to me to receive your opinions about the advantages or disadvantages of statewide competency testing programs. Would you please list perhaps a few questions that you believe should be included in a questionnaire of this type. Please do not feel obligated to participate, but if you would like to send me your questions, use the enclosed sheet and deposit them in my campus mail box located in Morris Hall, or send them through the campus mail. Please return your suggestions by June 30. If you would like to receive a summary of the results of this study, please indicate this desire on the enclosed sheet.

Sincerely,

Max von Klein
Morris Hall

APPENDIX B

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY CONCERNING COMPETENCY TESTING

Directions: There are three parts to this questionnaire: Part I requests information; Part II asks your opinion about competency programs; Part III requests information from state officials that implemented competency programs. Please check the appropriate response, and/or fill in the information requested. Return the questionnaire by August 25 to the following address:

Mr. Max von Klein
 Division of Teacher Education
 Morris Hall
 University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
 La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

Total Tallies/Percentages Given

Part I: General Information

1. What is the title of your current position? _____

2. Your state? _____
3. Were you elected or appointed to this position?

9/19.1 %	Elected
36/76.6 %	Appointed
4. Does your state currently require competency examinations for high school graduation?

16/34 %	Yes
32/68.1 %	No
5. If you answered Yes to #4, is this a statewide policy or is it an option of local school boards?

15/93.75%	Statewide
1/ 6.25%	Local School Board Option
6. How long has your state competency program been in operation?

3	1 year or less
1	2 years
2	3 years
7	4 years
1	5 years
2	More than 5 years

7. If you answered No to #4, does your state have plans for competency tests in the future?
- | | |
|------------------|--|
| <u>2/ 6.5 %</u> | Yes, legislation has passed and will go into effect in _____ (specify year). |
| <u>19/61.3 %</u> | No |
| <u>5/16.1 %</u> | Uncertain |
| <u>4/12.9 %</u> | Other (please specify) _____ |

Part II: Opinions of Competency Testing (NOTE: Please check the response that most closely reflects your personal opinions to the statements below.)

8. Minimum competency tests are a result of the lack of confidence the public has in the school's abilities to educate the young today.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>37/78.7 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>7/14.9 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>3/ 6.4 %</u> | Undecided |
9. Minimum competency testing programs are a response to ensure that a high school diploma has a renewed meaning.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>40/85.1 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>7/14.9 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>0</u> | Undecided |
10. Minimum competency programs will ensure that a student will have the basic "life skills" to succeed.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>30/63.8 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>9/19.1 %</u> | Undecided |
11. What should be judged when a particular school has a high number of students that failed the minimum competency tests? (Please check the one response you feel the strongest for.)
- | | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>5/10.6 %</u> | Teacher Performance |
| <u>19/40.4 %</u> | School Curriculum |
| <u>5/10.6 %</u> | Student Performance |
| <u>20/42.6 %</u> | Other (please specify) _____ |
12. Minimum competency testing programs are beneficial because they can be used to identify problems in students early in their programs and thus allow time to design a course outline which will enable the student to pass the competency test.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>36/76.6 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>7/14.9 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>4/ 8.5 %</u> | Undecided |
13. Minimum competency programs are useful for measuring the educational growth of individual students.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>24/51.1 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>18/38.3 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>4/ 8.5 %</u> | Undecided |

14. Minimum competency tests are useful for screening and detecting special education students.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>10/21.3 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>34/72.3 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>2/ 4.3 %</u> | Undecided |
15. The use of minimum competency tests encourages students to attain only minimal standards.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>13/27.7 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>28/59.6 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>6/12.7 %</u> | Undecided |
16. The implementation of competency tests results in teachers and administrators focusing their energies toward the subject matter of the competency tests.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>37/78.7 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>4/ 8.5 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>4/ 8.5 %</u> | Undecided |
17. The implementation of statewide competency programs results in local school districts losing some of its control over education.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>21/44.7 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>23/48.9 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>1/ 2.1 %</u> | Undecided |
18. Competency testing programs stifle teacher creativity.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>34/72.3 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>5/10.6 %</u> | Undecided |
19. Competency testing programs decrease the emphasis on most liberal arts and fine arts programs.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>18.38.3 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>24/51.1 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>5/10.6 %</u> | Undecided |
20. There is a danger that school wide performance on competency tests could be used to demonstrate that a particular school district is not doing an adequate job.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>37/78.7 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>2/ 4.3 %</u> | Undecided |
21. Statewide competency programs usually do not reflect the individual goals of the local school board.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>19/40.4 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>18/38.3 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Undecided |

22. Competency tests measure how competent one is in taking a test, not basic skills.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>6/12.8 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>29/61.7 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>12/25.5 %</u> | Undecided |
23. Competency tests measure how well a student may do later on in school, not life.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>12/25.5 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>19/40.4 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>13/27.7 %</u> | Undecided |
24. All students, with the possible exception of special education students, could pass most competency tests if they really wanted to.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>20/42.6 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>15/31.9 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Undecided |
25. Important skills such as critical thinking and creativity cannot be measured in terms of competency tests.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>27/57.4 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>17/36.2 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>2/ 4.3 %</u> | Undecided |
26. There is a danger that the use of competency tests could be used to show that certain teachers are not performing their job adequately
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>33/70.2 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>9/19.1 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>3/ 6.4 %</u> | Undecided |
27. Minimum competency testing programs will result in teachers improving their teaching effectiveness.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>18/38.3 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>13/27.7 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>15/31.9 %</u> | Undecided |
28. Those students in special education programs who do not pass the minimum competency standards should not receive a diploma.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>9/19.1 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>27/57.4 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Undecided |
29. Minimum competency tests reflect a cultural and language bias that favors white middle class students and handicaps non-white and/or lower class students.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>8/17.0 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>30/63.8 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>9/19.1 %</u> | Undecided |

30. The theory behind minimum competency programs appears to be that legislating goal attainment is sufficient for goal advancement to occur.
- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| <u>18/38.3 %</u> | Agree |
| <u>21/44.7 %</u> | Disagree |
| <u>7/14.9 %</u> | Undecided |

If your state DOES NOT have a competency testing program, please STOP here and return the questionnaire.

Please proceed to Part III if your state uses some form of competency testing to determine high school graduation.

Part III: States Using Competency Tests (NOTE: If the responses do not adequately allow you to answer the questions, please write your comments next to the items in question.)

31. Is high school graduation in your state determined solely by competency tests and course completion?
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| <u>4/25.0 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>9/56.2 %</u> | No |
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Other (please specify) _____ |
32. At what grade(s) level(s) is/are the competency tests given? (please list the grade(s)). _____
33. Are promotions in other grades tied to student performance on competency tests?
- | | |
|------------------|-----|
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>15/93.8 %</u> | No |
- If Yes, please explain: _____
-
34. When is the competency test administered?
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| <u>7/43.8 %</u> | Spring Semester |
| <u>5/31.3 %</u> | Fall Semester |
| <u>8/50 %</u> | Other (please explain) _____ |
35. Who administers the competency tests?
- | | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>11/68.8 %</u> | Classroom teachers |
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Principals |
| <u>4/25.0 %</u> | Guidance counselors |
| <u>7/43.8 %</u> | Other (please explain) _____ |
36. Does your state permit students who pass the minimum competency tests to exist from high school at an early age?
- | | |
|------------------|-----|
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>13/81.2 %</u> | No |

37. How many opportunities are students given to pass the competency exams before the high school diploma is denied?
- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>0/0</u> | Once |
| <u>0/0</u> | Twice |
| <u>1/ 6.25%</u> | Three times |
| <u>14/87.5 %</u> | More than three times |
38. How long is a student allowed to remain in high school to try and pass the competency test before he/she is asked to leave?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| <u>1/ 6.25%</u> | One summer session after the 12th grade |
| <u>1/ 6.25%</u> | One full academic year after the 12th grade |
| <u>6/37.5 %</u> | More than one full academic year following the 12th grade |
39. Do students have the opportunity to receive remedial help if they fail the competency tests?
- | | |
|-------------------|-----|
| <u>16/100 %</u> | Yes |
| <u> </u> | No |
40. Did the majority of your school districts that use competency tests find it necessary to create additional programs to help students pass these tests?
- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| <u>10/62.5 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>4/25.0 %</u> | No (proceed to #42) |
41. Is the funding for these additional programs the responsibility of the local school board, the state, or both?
- | | |
|-----------------|-------|
| <u>2/15.4 %</u> | Local |
| <u>2/15.4 %</u> | State |
| <u>7/53.8 %</u> | Both |
42. If a student does fail the competency test, is he/she required to pass the whole test gain, or just the area(s) of weakness(es)?
- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>6/37.5 %</u> | Must pass whole test |
| <u>8/50.0 %</u> | Just the area(s) of weakness(es) |
43. What skill areas do your competency testing program encompass?
- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| <u>16/100 %</u> | Reading skills |
| <u>12/27.0 %</u> | Composition skills |
| <u>16/100 %</u> | Math/computing skills |
| <u>2/12.5 %</u> | "Life skills" (specify) _____ |
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Other (specify) _____ |
44. Are the students told what general areas will be covered on the competency tests?
- | | |
|------------------|-----|
| <u>15/93.8 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>0/0</u> | No |

45. What options exist for those students who are not able to pass the competency tests in the allotted time?
- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>7/43.7 %</u> | Receive a certificate of attendance |
| <u>10/62.5 %</u> | Other (please specify) _____ |
46. Are the minimum skills to be tested determined by the state or by local school districts?
- | | |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>11/68.8 %</u> | Determined by state |
| <u>1/ 6.2 %</u> | Determined by local school districts |
| <u>3/18.8 %</u> | Determined by both |
47. Is the financing for the administration and scoring of these tests the responsibility of
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| <u>5/31.3 %</u> | Local school districts |
| <u>9/56.3 %</u> | State agencies |
| <u>2/15.4 %</u> | Both |
48. Are the minimum competency tests developed by the
- | | |
|------------------|--|
| <u>10/62.5 %</u> | State |
| <u>8/50.0 %</u> | Outside agency (such as Educational Testing Service) |
| <u>4/25.0 %</u> | Local school districts |
49. What type of testing form is usually used?
- | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>14/87.5 %</u> | Criterion referenced |
| <u>2/12.5 %</u> | Simulated performance situations |
| <u>2/12.5 %</u> | Other (please specify) _____ |
50. Is the minimum standard for passing set before or after the test is given?
- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| <u>14/87.5 %</u> | Set before |
| <u>1/ 6.2 %</u> | Set after |
51. Has the use of competency tests improved the performance of your graduates in basic skills?
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| <u>9/56.3 %</u> | Yes |
| <u>0/0</u> | No |
| <u>4/25.0 %</u> | Other (please explain) _____ |

Does your state agency possess research results which indicate the success of your minimum competency program and/or how it has improved basic skills acquisition?

(Please do not feel obligated to supply information to respond to this question. I would however, be very pleased to receive any additional information or materials you can supply.)

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO THE OFFICIALS



University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

(608) 785-8000

August 6, 1981

Dear

You have been identified in the Education Directory of State Education Agency Officials as the head of the agency responsible for public education in your state. The attached questionnaire is part of a masters thesis project designed to survey the opinions of public instruction officials about the pros and cons of basic skills competency tests as a requirement for high school graduation.

I would appreciate your directly providing me your reactions or opinions concerning the use of competency examinations. You may wish to designate an appropriate person in your administration to respond to the questionnaire.

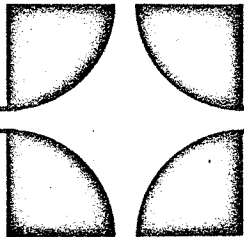
Would you please complete the questionnaire prior to August 25, and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. Only 50 questionnaires are being sent out; therefore, it is vital that I receive yours. Your anonymity is guaranteed because individual responses will not be reported. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research, please send me your name and address.

Sincerely,

Max von Klein
Division of Teacher Education
Morris Hall

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO THE OFFICIALS



University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

(608) 785-8000

September 3, 1981

Dear

If you have not yet responded to the questionnaire that I sent to you, would you please take a few minutes today to complete this survey.

I am enclosing an additional copy of the questionnaire and the cover letter in case you have misplaced the original.

Sincerely,

Max von Klein
Division of Teacher Education
Morris Hall

APPENDIX E

PART III OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL STATES
MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAM

	H.S. graduation determined solely by CT and course completion			Grade levels assessed	Grade promotion tied to MCT		When administered		
	Yes	No	Other		Yes	No	Spring	Fall	Other
Alabama			X	3, 6, 9		X	X		
Arizona	X			8, 12		X			X
California			X	4-6, 7-9, 10-11	X				X
Florida		X		3, 5, 8, 11		X	X	X	
Georgia			X	4, 8, 10		X	X	X	
Hawaii	X			9, 12		X		X	X
Maryland		X		9-12		X		X	
Nevada		X		3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12		X	X	X	
New Jersey		X		3, 6, 9, 11	Local Option		X		
New Mexico		X		10, 11, 12		X	X		
New York	X			9-12		X			X
North Carolina	X			11		X		X	
Oregon		X		6-12		X			X
Tennessee	X			9		X	X		
Utah		X		5, 7, 9, 11	Local Option				X
Virginia		X		10, 11, 12		X	X		

	Administered by				Permit early exit		Number of opportunities to pass			
	Teacher	Principal	Guidance	Other	Yes	No	One	Two	Three	More
Alabama	X					X			X	
Arizona	X					X				X
California	(depends on the district)					X	(depends on the district)			
Florida	X		X			X				X
Georgia	X		X	X		X				X
Hawaii	X					X				X
Maryland				X		X				X
Nevada	X	X	X		X					X
New Jersey	X				X					X
New Mexico	X	X	X			X				X
New York				X		X				X
North Carolina				X		X				X
Oregon	X		X	X		X				X
Tennessee	X					X				X
Utah	X			X		X				X
Virginia				X		X				X

	Can remain in school after 12th grade			Do students receive remedial help		Need to create additional remedial courses	
	One summer	Full Year	More	Yes	No	Yes	No
Alabama			X	X		X	
Arizona			X	X			X
California	(depends on the district)			X		N/A	
Florida		X		X		X	
Georgia	N/A			X		N/A	
Hawaii	X			X			X
Maryland			X	X		X	
Nevada	N/A			X			X
New Jersey			X	X		X	
New Mexico			X	X		X	
New York			X	X		X	
North Carolina			X	X		X	
Oregon			X	X		X	
Tennessee	(no provision after 12)			X		X	
Utah			X	X			X
Virginia	(until age 20)			X		X	

	Funding for remediation is the responsibility			If students fail, must pass		Skills assessed				
	Local	State	Both	Whole Test	Area(s) of Weakness	Reading	Composition	Math	Life Skills	Others
Alabama	X				X	X	X	X		
Arizona	N/A			X		X	X	X		
California	(depends on the district)			(depends on the district)		X	X	X		
Florida			X		X	X	X	X		
Georgia			X		X	X	X	X		X
Hawaii	N/A			X		X	X	X	X	
Maryland			X	X		X				
Nevada	N/A			X	X	X	X	X		
New Jersey			X	X		X	X	X		
New Mexico		X		X		X	X	X	X	
New York			X	N/A		X	X	X		
North Carolina		X			X	X		X		
Oregon			X	N/A		X	X	X		X
Tennessee	X				X	X	X	X		
Utah	N/A				X	X		X		
Virginia			X		X	X		X		

	Students told areas test covers		Option if fail		Skills to be tested determined by			Financing done by		
	Yes	No	Certificate of		State	Local	Both	Local	State	Both
			Attendance	Other						
Alabama	X		X		X				X	
Arizona	X		N/A				X	X		
California	(Depends on the district)			X	X			X		
Florida	X			X	X					X
Georgia	X		X		X				X	
Hawaii	X		N/A		X				X	
Maryland	X			X			X		X	
Nevada	X		X	X						X
New Jersey	X			X	X				X	
New Mexico	X		X	X	X				X	
New York	X			X	X			X		
North Carolina	X		X		X				X	
Oregon	X		X			X		X		
Tennessee	X			X	X				X	
Utah	X		(Varies from district)				X	X		
Virginia	X		X		X				X	

	Tests developed by			Testing from used			Passing standard set		Have improved basic skills		
	State	Outside	Local	Criterion reference	Simulated performance	Other	Before	After	Yes	No	Other
Alabama	X			X			X		X		
Arizona			X	X			X		N/A		
California	(Depends on the district)			(Depends on the district)			X				X
Florida		X		X			X		X		
Georgia	X			X			N/A		N/A		
Hawaii		X		X			X		X		
Maryland	X	X	X	X			X		X		
Nevada	X					X	X				X
New Jersey	X	X		X			X		X		
New Mexico	X			X			X		X		
New York	X	X		X			X		X		
North Carolina	X			X			X		X		
Oregon			X	X	X		X		X		
Tennessee	X	X		X				X			X
Utah		X	X	X	X	X	X		N/A		
Virginia	X	X		X			X				X