

# Employer Certification Exams

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## Questions

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- **Why did we do the study?**
- **What criteria were used in conducting the study?**
- **How did we conduct the study?**
- **How did we decide to recommend some examinations without reservation and others provisionally?**

## Questions

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- **What are the limitations of the study?**
- **What are the advantages of certification exams?**
- **What types of exams did we review?**
- **What are the challenges in using certification exams?**

# Why did we do the study?

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- Requested by a state superintendent
  - The legislature passed an amendment to the state's high school graduation law that permitted certification examinations to replace certain academic examinations for career/technical (CT) students
  - Superintendent wanted to determine if passing a certification examination would have comparable rigor to passing academic end of course exam

**Issue on Rigor: academic course match versus rigorous by complexity of technical materials**

# What criteria were used in conducting the study?

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## ■ Rigor

- Depth of knowledge versus breadth of knowledge
- Higher levels of complexity

## ■ Essential Criteria

- 9 Criteria all examinations must meet

## ■ Necessary

- Criteria to ensure that the exams were appropriate at the 12th-grade level and met state and/or national standards
- Blueprint and sample questions were reviewed to see if they represent 12th-grade level of work

## ■ Desirable

- Criteria to ensure that the exams met a certain threshold for test quality, development and support

# What criteria were used in conducting the study?

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## Essential Criteria

- Examination is
  - Standardized
  - Independently graded
  - Knowledge-based
  - Administered nationally or internationally
- Examination results in a recognized credential
- Examination results are available immediately
- Examination cut scores are set using a standards-setting or other logical process
- Examination represents employer relevance
- Examination content reflects academic studies

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# What criteria were used in conducting the study?

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## Necessary Criteria

- Recommended preparation and classroom contact hours are equal to or greater than a single Carnegie unit
  - Examinations were matched with a state's recommended curriculum to determine necessary courses to be prepared for the exam
  - Examination blueprints and sample questions were reviewed to determine if the level of work was appropriate for high school level

# What criteria were used in conducting the study?

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## Desirable Criteria

- Follow appropriate psychometric and test development procedures
- High quality is continually maintained
- Includes accommodations for students with disabilities and/or non-native speakers
- Protects candidate's identity

# How did we conduct the study?

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- **Test information sheet completed**
  - Appendix A on page 24
- **Organizations and Professional Associations**
  - Appendix B on page 27
- **Reviewed by panel to determine level to recommend**
  - Recommended without reservation or
  - Provisionally recommended

# How did we decide to recommend the examinations?

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- Examinations were reviewed by the criteria listed.
  - Any examination that did not meet the essential criteria was immediately rejected
- Examinations that did not sufficiently meet the **necessary and desirable** criteria were reviewed by a panel.
  - Each reviewer determined whether to recommend by the information provided by the test provider
  - When reviewers did not independently come to the same conclusion, reviewers conferred to determine the final recommendation level

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# How did we decide to recommend the examinations?

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- For examinations provisionally recommended, the panel provided a reason for not giving a full recommendation.
  - The main reasons why examinations were provisionally recommended:
    - Insufficient information
    - Exams too narrow in breadth were bundled with related exams
    - Not endorsed by a national or international organization representative of employers
    - Failed to have employer-based cut scores as measures of work readiness

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# What are the limitations of the study?

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- 300 examinations were not reviewed because we accepted the state's recommendation that they were not suitable
  - 204 examinations reviewed
  - 86 examinations were recommended without reservation
  - 91 examinations were provisionally recommended
- Could not obtain copies of exam reviewed due to their proprietary nature
- Level of participation in this study by test providers differed greatly

# What are the advantages of certification exams?

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- **Standardize the knowledge that every program of study needs to cover to ensure participating students are prepared for the job**
- **Assist employers to know that the student has verified knowledge and skills to handle the requirements of the job**

# What types of exams did we review?

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Three examination types were reviewed:

Examinations developed by:

1. Content creators to assess whether students had mastered their curriculum
2. An employer group or coalition
3. Examination vendors

# What are the challenges in using certification exams?

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- 1. Examination results or scores not provided to state**
- 2. Many examination providers are not very customer friendly especially for students**
- 3. There are no cut scores for some examinations**
- 4. Many examinations do not meet the psychometrics for state high stakes assessments**
- 5. Can individual states and test providers work together? Is it economical?**

# Actions to move forward

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## Commission an entity to:

- Study how to use employer certification examinations for high school students
- Establish working relationships with the vendors and test providers
- Recommend standards that states could use in selecting employer certification examinations

# SREB's policy on employer certification examinations at the high school level

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1. Require all students to take **reading, writing and mathematics** examinations suggested by the state for graduation or AYP.
2. Use employer certification examinations as replacements for other graduation tests.

## **SREB's policy on employer certification examinations at the high school level**

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- 3. States should recognize programs of study that prepare students for accelerated learning**
  - **Advanced Placement**
  - **International Baccalaureate**
  - **Employer certification exams**

## Personal opinion

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- Validation of programs of study in community colleges
- Consider a “5-year” program of study with the 5th year being completed at a community college, apprenticeship or at a technical college.