

## Alternative Assessment Options for High School Graduation: Interim Report

### Revised

The 2006 Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to “explore options to augment the current system of assessments to provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have met the state learning standards.”<sup>1</sup>

**This report reviews the three options currently used in Washington’s assessment system and considers four additional alternatives.**

The study legislation directs the Institute to consult with experts and stakeholders to identify assessment options for review. The appendix to this report summarizes the consultation process and the content of stakeholder input received to date.

The Legislature also requested that the Institute’s interim report “include recommendations on at least two alternative assessment options, alternative methods, procedures, or performance measures that were reviewed.”<sup>2</sup> Based on the following review, the Institute recommends that:

**1) The number of alternative assessment options should be limited.**

*Feedback from stakeholders indicates that the complexities involved with implementing alternative assessments increase as the number of options increase.*

**2) An option’s potential to improve student outcomes should be balanced with the cost and complexity of its implementation.**

*Given two alternative assessments with the same potential to increase met-standard rates,<sup>3</sup> the option that is the least costly and difficult to implement is preferred. In light of our first recommendation, we propose that more effective options should supplant less effective ones.*

<sup>1</sup> SSB 6618 § 2 (1), Chapter 352, Laws of 2006.

<sup>2</sup> SSB 6618 § 2 (3), Chapter 352, Laws of 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this report, “met-standard” rates refer to the percentage of students who meet state learning standards on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

### Summary

The 2006 Legislature directed the Institute to “explore options to augment the current system of assessments to provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have met the state learning standards.”

Students in Washington are required to “meet standard” on the 10th-grade reading, writing, and math Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to graduate from high school. The 2006 Legislature authorized three alternative assessment options to provide students who do not meet standard on the WASL twice with additional ways to demonstrate academic achievement: the Collection of Evidence (COE), GPA subject-area cohort, and PSAT/SAT/ACT exam scores.

In most other states with alternative assessment options, few students (2 percent or less) graduate by taking an alternative assessment. In Washington, nearly 50 percent of students in the class of 2008 are currently or potentially eligible to take an alternative to the WASL.

This report examines the three alternative assessments authorized in Washington as well as college placement exams, comprehensive achievement tests, overall GPA, and segmented math exams. The review finds that standardized tests and grade-based options are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, but have low potential to increase the percentage of students who meet standard. Washington’s COE has higher potential to increase met-standard rates, but incurs greater implementation costs and complexities. In contrast, diagnostic segmented math exams have lower implementation costs but high potential to improve student outcomes.

**3) Alternative assessments that are diagnostic should be considered.**

*Once developed, diagnostic exams are relatively inexpensive to administer and have the greatest potential to increase met-standard rates, because they can be used to identify areas in need of improvement.*

## ASSESSMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

In this report, “exit exams” refer to state tests that students must pass in order to graduate from high school. “Alternative assessment options” are other measures of academic performance that are administered to students when they do not perform satisfactorily on the state exit exam. States that allow alternative assessments use them as an additional pathway for students to demonstrate academic achievement and become eligible for high school graduation.

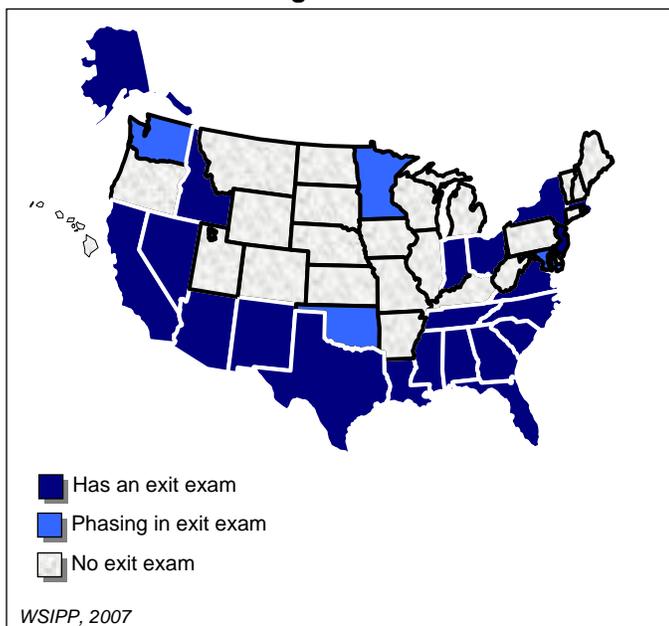
### High School Exit Exams

Twenty-five states require high school students to pass an exit exam to graduate.<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1 identifies these states. Students in these states must take and pass English language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics exams; in 13 of the 25 states, students also must take science and/or social studies exams.

Beginning with the class of 2008, students in Washington must “meet standard” in three content areas of the 10th-grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)—reading, writing, and math—to graduate from high school.<sup>5</sup>

Exhibit 1

### States With High School Exit Exams



<sup>4</sup> Twenty-one of these states currently withhold diplomas from students based on exit exam results. Four states will soon begin withholding diplomas: Washington (2008), Maryland (2009), Minnesota (2010), and Oklahoma (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Beginning with the class of 2010, Washington students must take a science exam as well.

## Alternative Assessment Options

Fourteen of the 25 states with exit exams have authorized one or more alternative assessment options. These alternative options include performance-based assessments, grade-based options, and substitute exams.

- 1) **Performance-based assessments** allow students to complete tasks, rather than tests, to demonstrate academic achievement. These tasks may include (but are not limited to) oral presentations, written essays, and hands-on activities. Four states allow students to submit collections of work samples as a performance-based alternative assessment.<sup>6</sup>
- 2) **Grade-based options** involve the use of teacher-assigned grades in specific courses or a student's overall grade point average (GPA) as a measure of achievement. Depending on state policy, student grades may be used as a substitute for exit exam scores or in combination with exam scores. For example, an exit exam score may be indexed with GPA to determine eligibility for graduation. This combination of assessment results is sometimes referred to as a “multiple measures” approach.<sup>7</sup> Seven states allow the use of grades as an alternative assessment option.<sup>8</sup>
- 3) **Substitute exams** are tests that may be taken in place of the regular exit exam. Students who pursue this option may substitute their scores from a different exam, usually a nationally available standardized test, for their state exit exam results. Exhibit 2 on the following page lists examples of substitute exams. State or local policy determines how substitute exam scores correspond to scores on the state exam; these equivalent scores are referred to as “cut scores.”<sup>9</sup> Nine states allow students to use substitute exam scores to obtain a high school diploma.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Washington.

<sup>7</sup> L. Darling-Hammond, E. Rustique-Forrester, & R. Pecheone. (2005). *Multiple measures approaches to high school graduation*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network, Stanford University School of Education.

<sup>8</sup> Arizona, Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, and Washington.

<sup>9</sup> Whether test approval and cut scores are set at the state or local level varies.

<sup>10</sup> Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington.

**Exhibit 2**  
**Types of Substitute Exams**

Type of Exam	Examples/Details
College admissions	PSAT, SAT, ACT
College placement	ASSET, COMPASS, ACCUPLACER
Comprehensive achievement	National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
Career skill certification	Industry-specific certification exams; ACT Workkeys
General Educational Development (GED)	This option assumes that students would stay in high school to graduate after they obtain a GED
End of course	Exams administered at the end of specific courses by content area, including "segmented" math exams
Language proficiency	Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT)

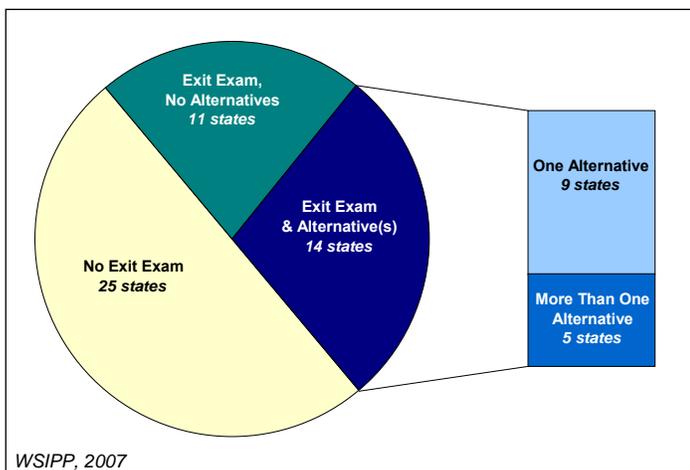
Of the 14 states that have authorized an alternative assessment option, nine states<sup>11</sup> authorize a single option and five states<sup>12</sup> authorize more than one option (see Exhibit 3). Washington and Indiana authorize all three types of alternative assessment options.<sup>13</sup>

**Student Eligibility for Alternatives**

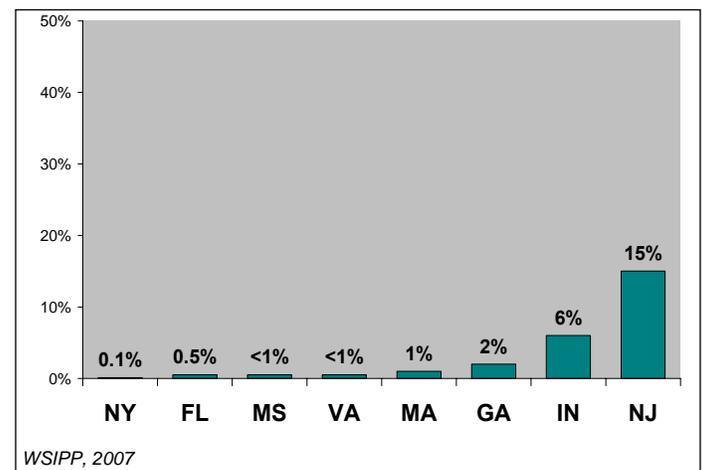
In all 14 states that have authorized alternative assessments for high school graduation, students must first take the state exit exam at least once before pursuing an alternative. In Washington, students are required to take and not meet standard on the WASL twice before becoming eligible to take an alternative assessment.

In other states, relatively few students take alternative assessments. Exhibit 4 displays the percentage of students who graduated by taking an alternative assessment in eight states that track this information. In six of these states, 2 percent or fewer of high school graduates in 2005 took an alternative assessment. In New Jersey, 15 percent of high school graduates participated in an alternative assessment; because of this relatively high percentage, education and business leaders in New Jersey have decried alternative assessments as a "loophole" around state learning standards.<sup>14</sup>

**Exhibit 3**  
**States by Exit Exam Status and Number of Authorized Alternatives**



**Exhibit 4**  
**Percentage of Students Graduating Via Alternative Assessments, Other States 2005**



<sup>11</sup> Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, Virginia, Mississippi, and Ohio.

<sup>12</sup> Idaho, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and Washington.

<sup>13</sup> In Indiana, substitute test scores and performance-based assessments are both linked with grades. For example, to graduate by taking a substitute exam alternative (in this case a workforce readiness assessment), Indiana students must also maintain a C average in courses required for high school graduation.

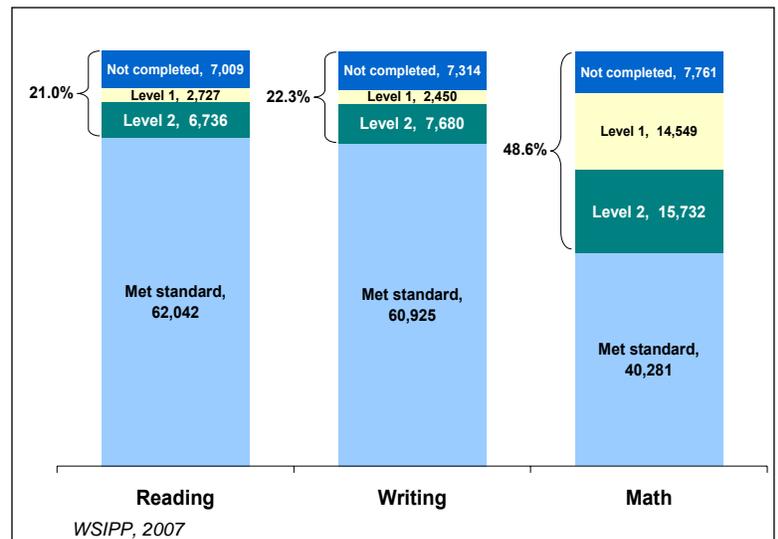
<sup>14</sup> C. Gewertz. (2006). Raising bar in N.J. includes closing test loophole. *Education Week* 26(8): 1-14.

A much larger share of Washington students will likely use alternative assessments as a pathway to graduation. Exhibit 5 displays the number of Washington students currently and potentially eligible to take an alternative assessment by subject area. To be “eligible” for an alternative assessment, a student must have not met standard on the WASL twice.

Currently, more students are eligible to take an alternative assessment in math compared with reading and writing: to date, 6,548 students have taken the math WASL twice without meeting standard. An additional 31,494 students are potentially eligible to take an alternative math assessment: 23,733 did not meet standard on their first try and 7,761 have not yet taken the WASL due to absence or other reasons.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, for the class of 2008, up to 21 percent of Washington students in reading, 22.3 percent in writing, and 48.6 percent in math could take an alternative assessment to graduate from high school.

**Exhibit 6**  
**Class of 2008 Students by WASL Status**  
(Based on Spring and Summer 2006 WASL Results)



**Exhibit 5**  
**Washington Class of 2008 Students by Eligibility for Alternative Assessment Options**

	Reading	Writing	Math
<b>Students slated to take the spring 2006 WASL</b>			
Total	78,514	78,369	78,323
<b>Currently eligible</b>			
Did not meet standard twice	1,058	831	6,548
Percentage currently eligible	1.3%	1.1%	8.4%
<b>Potentially eligible</b>			
Did not meet standard once	8,405	9,299	23,733
Have not yet taken WASL	7,009	7,314	7,761
Total potentially eligible	15,414	16,613	31,494
Percentage potentially eligible	19.6%	21.2%	40.2%
<b>Currently or potentially eligible</b>			
Total	16,472	17,444	38,042
Percent	21.0%	22.3%	48.6%
<b>Not eligible</b>			
Met standard	62,042	60,925	40,281
Percentage not eligible	79.0%	77.7%	51.4%

Exhibit 6 illustrates these percentages and shows the performance levels of students who have not yet met standard. For example, of the 9,463 students who have taken but not yet met standard on the reading WASL, 2,727 students performed at Level 1 (Below Basic) and 6,736 performed at Level 2 (Basic). In contrast, 62,042 students performed at Level 3 (Proficient) or Level 4 (Advanced) on the reading WASL.

<sup>15</sup> A forthcoming Institute report will examine the characteristics of students in the class of 2008 who have not yet completed the WASL.

### WASHINGTON’S ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The 2006 Washington State Legislature approved three alternative assessment options that students may use to meet high school graduation requirements:

- Collection of Evidence (COE),
- GPA Subject-Area Cohort, and
- PSAT/SAT/ACT substitute exam scores.<sup>16</sup>

These alternatives correspond to the performance-based, grade-based, and substitute exam options discussed previously.

The COE and GPA options were approved for all three subject areas (reading, writing, and math); the PSAT/SAT/ACT option was approved for math only. Implementation guidelines for the Collection of Evidence and PSAT/SAT/ACT options have been developed by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and approved by the State Board of Education; proposed rules for the subject-area GPA option are in development.

<sup>16</sup> ESSB 6475, Chapter 115, Laws of 2006. These options are distinct from the Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS) for special education students. Results from those alternate assessments are covered in a separate Institute report: W. Cole & R. Barnoski. (2006). *Tenth-grade alternate assessments for special populations: Summary results*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Available at: <<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/06-11-2202.pdf>>.

**Exhibit 7**  
**Washington “Met-Standard” Cut Scores for**  
**PSAT, SAT, and ACT Math Tests**

	PSAT	SAT	ACT
Washington cut score	47	470	19
Minimum possible score	20	200	1
Maximum possible score	80	800	36

**Performance-based assessment: Collection of Evidence.** The Collection of Evidence (COE) is a portfolio of classroom work samples prepared by students. Teachers oversee the compilation process. OSPI developed content guidelines and administrative protocols for implementing the COE.<sup>17</sup> The COE will be centrally scored by a panel of trained teachers.

The legislation that authorizes the COE option contains special provisions for career and technical education (CTE) students.<sup>18</sup> CTE student work samples must be relevant to their CTE program and also address general state learning standards (the Essential Academic Learning Requirements or EALRs). Students using this option must also attain a state or nationally recognized industry certificate or credential.

**Grade-based option: GPA subject-area cohort.** Under this option, a student’s GPA in English/language arts or math classes is compared with the average GPA for a “cohort” of six or more students who: attended the same school, took the same subject-area courses, and met or slightly exceeded standard on the WASL. If the student’s subject-area GPA is equal to or higher than the cohort’s average GPA, the student is deemed to have met standard in that subject area. OSPI is currently developing rules for implementing this option.<sup>19</sup>

**Substitute exams: PSAT/SAT/ACT (math only).** A student who does not meet standard on the math WASL twice can substitute his or her score from the math section of the PSAT, SAT, or ACT.<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 7 displays the scores students must obtain on each of these tests to meet standard. The State Board of Education set these cut scores based on an OSPI analysis of the SAT and WASL results.<sup>21</sup> School districts submit a form to OSPI to document the students who become eligible for high school graduation under this option.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> These guidelines and protocols were approved by the State Board of Education on October 27, 2006. The OSPI-developed COE handbook can be found at: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/CAAoptions/pubdocs/CAAOptionsHandbook2007.pdf>>.

<sup>18</sup> ESSB 6475 § 1 (6) (b), Chapter 115, Laws of 2006.

<sup>19</sup> For more detail, see: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/ProfPractices/adminresources/RulesProcess/WebNotice392-501.doc>>.

<sup>20</sup> Students can use PSAT, SAT, or ACT scores obtained prior to taking the WASL or take one of these exams later.

<sup>21</sup> J. Wilhoft. (2006). *Using mathematics portion of SAT, ACT, or PSAT as an alternative for the Certificate of Academic Achievement*. Olympia: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. See:

<<http://www.sbe.wa.gov/meetings/lastmeeting/nov06/SAT-ACT-PSATcuts.ppt>>.

<sup>22</sup> For a copy of this form, see: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/CAAoptions/pubdocs/1632.doc>>.

**ASSESSMENT OPTIONS REVIEW**

The 2006 Legislature directed the Institute to “explore options to augment the current system of assessments to provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have met the state learning standards.”<sup>23</sup> For this report, the Institute reviewed the three options authorized in Washington State:

- Collection of Evidence;
- GPA Subject-Area Cohort; and
- PSAT/SAT/ACT substitute exam scores.

The Institute also reviewed four additional options:

- College placement exams that evaluate students’ readiness for college-level courses in reading, writing, and math (such as ASSET, COMPASS, and ACCUPLACER);
- Comprehensive achievement tests (such as the Iowa Test of Educational Development and National Assessment of Educational Progress);
- Overall GPA (based on grades from all courses, without reference to subject area); and
- Segmented math exams (two types):
  - 1) End-of-course exams that function as a summative assessment (i.e., determine whether students have mastered the content), and
  - 2) Diagnostic exams that contain a sufficient number of items to identify student strengths and weaknesses in a given subject area or “strand.”<sup>24</sup> Diagnostic

<sup>23</sup> SSB 6618 § 2 (1) Chapter 352, Laws of 2006.

<sup>24</sup> As the WASL is currently designed, individual strands do not contain enough test items to ensure reliability. Increasing the number of items that correspond to a particular strand would increase the reliability of test results, which could then be used to diagnose areas in need of improvement. W. Cole & R. Barnoski. (2006). *Tenth-grade WASL strands: Student performance varies considerably over time*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 06-11-2205.

exams can be administered during and at the end of a course.<sup>25</sup>

**Legislative Review Criteria.** We reviewed each of these options according to the following criteria established in the legislative study assignment:

- Compliance with RCW 28A.655.061(1), which states that “alternative assessments for each content area shall be **comparable in rigor** to the skills and knowledge that the student must demonstrate on the Washington assessment of student learning”;
- **Reliability** in measuring a student’s ability to meet state learning standards;
- Whether assessment procedures or methods could be **standardized** across the state;
- **Costs** for implementation; and
- **Challenges to implementation**, including any legislative action necessary for implementation.

In addition to these legislative criteria, we examined each option according to the anticipated impact on student outcomes: **the potential to increase met-standard rates**. If the goal of alternative assessments is to enable “students to demonstrate achievement of the state standards in content areas in which the student has not yet met the standard,”<sup>26</sup> then an effective option should, in addition to satisfying the criteria established by the Legislature, also serve to increase overall met-standard rates.

The following sections summarize the Institute’s findings to date according to these review criteria. Alternative assessment options are grouped by their potential to increase met-standard rates. The report does not evaluate the cultural appropriateness of alternative assessments, another legislatively mandated review criterion; our work on this complex topic is ongoing and will be addressed in a forthcoming report.

## **Substitute Exams and Grade-Based Options: Low Potential to Increase Met-Standard Rates**

Substitute exams and grade-based options have a low potential to increase met-standard rates.

Nationally available **substitute exams**, such as college admissions tests, college placement tests, and comprehensive achievement tests, are relatively inexpensive, easy to implement, and standardized. Moreover, through the process of establishing cut scores, a level of rigor comparable to the WASL can be established.

However, met-standard rates are unlikely to increase substantially if substitute exams are comparable in rigor, because similar levels of academic preparation and skill are required for students to perform well on all these tests. Exhibit 8 displays correlations between SAT and WASL scores. Correlations range between 0 and 1, with higher correlations indicating stronger associations between exam scores.

The correlations between SAT math scores, which students may currently use to substitute for performance in math after two unsuccessful attempts to meet standard, and WASL math scores exceed 0.70. These moderately strong correlations mean that, on average, students who do poorly on the math WASL will also do poorly on the SAT and ACT. WASL reading scores are also moderately correlated with SAT verbal scores (0.63) and suggest a similar relationship.

**Exhibit 8**  
**Correlations Between SAT and WASL Scores**

Reading WASL and SAT Verbal	Writing WASL and SAT Verbal	Math WASL and SAT Math
0.63	0.19	0.79

*Source:* Institute analysis of SAT and WASL data. WASL data include 10th grade scores from 2001–02 and 2002–03 covering approximately 46,000 students (the precise number varies by subject area). Covering the same students, the SAT data are from 2004 and 2005.

Prior research has found similar relationships between WASL and other test scores. Exhibit 9 displays correlations reported in prior studies for comparison purposes. College admissions and comprehensive achievement test scores correlate more strongly with WASL scores than do college placement test scores. Across all types of tests, correlations with WASL scores are strongest in math.

<sup>25</sup> The 2006 Washington State Legislature directed OSPI to develop “a new tenth grade mathematics assessment tool that: (i) presents the mathematics essential learnings in segments for assessment; (ii) is comparable in content and rigor to the tenth grade mathematics WASL when all segments are considered together; and (iv) can be used to determine a student’s academic performance level.” ESSB 6386 § 512 (2) (a), Chapter 372, Laws of 2006.

<sup>26</sup> RCW 28A.655.065(2).

**Exhibit 9**  
**Prior Studies' Correlations Between**  
**Substitute Exam and WASL Scores**

	Reading	Writing	Math
<b>College admissions tests</b>			
SAT	0.60	0.38	0.75
ACT	0.64	0.41	0.71
<b>College placement tests</b>			
ASSET	0.48	0.43	0.60
COMPASS	0.38	0.36	0.43
ACCUPLACER	0.34	0.37	n/a
<b>Comprehensive achievement tests</b>			
NAEP (grade 4)	0.60	n/a	0.68
NAEP (grade 8)	0.61	n/a	0.76

Sources: D. McGhee. (2003). *The relationship between WASL scores and performance in the first year of university*. Seattle: University of Washington Office of Educational Assessment; D. Pavelchek, P. Stern, & D. Olson. (2002). *Relationship of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and placement tests used at community and technical colleges*. Olympia: Washington State University-Social & Economic Services Research Center; K. Sprigg. (2005). *Relationship between performance on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress and Washington Assessment of Student Learning*. Olympia: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The content and format of tests designed for different purposes (e.g., to measure college readiness rather than mastery of state learning standards) may not perfectly match the skills and knowledge measured by the WASL. An in-depth study conducted by Dr. David Conley and staff at the Center for Educational Policy Research examined the feasibility of implementing various alternative assessment options in Washington.<sup>27</sup>

As part of Dr. Conley's study, substitute test items and content descriptions were compared with Washington's math standards (the EALRs). This analysis found that, of the tests examined, between 0 and 31 percent of EALRs are covered by substitute exams (see Exhibit 10). Unless test items are purposefully selected to align with the skills and knowledge measured by the WASL, the content match will generally be much less than 100 percent.

<sup>27</sup> ESHB 2195, Chapter 19, Laws of 2004 directed OSPI to "develop options for implementing objective alternative assessments." This legislative direction initiated the comprehensive study released in 2005 by the Center for Educational Policy Research. *Study of alternative methods to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL): Feasibility study*. Eugene, OR: CEPR, available at: <[http://www.s4s.org/upload/WASL%20Final%20Report\\_093005.pdf](http://www.s4s.org/upload/WASL%20Final%20Report_093005.pdf)>.

**Exhibit 10**  
**Percentage of Math EALRs Covered by**  
**Selected Substitute Exams**

Type	Details	Average	Range
College admissions	SAT, 4 tests (L1-L4)	17%*	0.6% to 31%*
Other states' end-of-course exams	8 tests from: TX, TN, GA, VA, SC, IN, and Alberta, Canada (2)	17%	3% to 30%
ACT Workkeys	Applied Mathematics exam	14%	n/a
Industry certification exams	9 tests: NCCER (Masonry, Carpentry, HVAC, Construction, Core, Electrical, and Welding), Microsoft (70-310 and 70-210).	3%	0% to 11%

\* For SAT, the match is likely higher than 17% because college readiness content requires mastery of high school level math. Source: Center for Educational Policy Research. (2005). *Study of alternative methods to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL): Feasibility study*. Eugene, OR: CEPR.

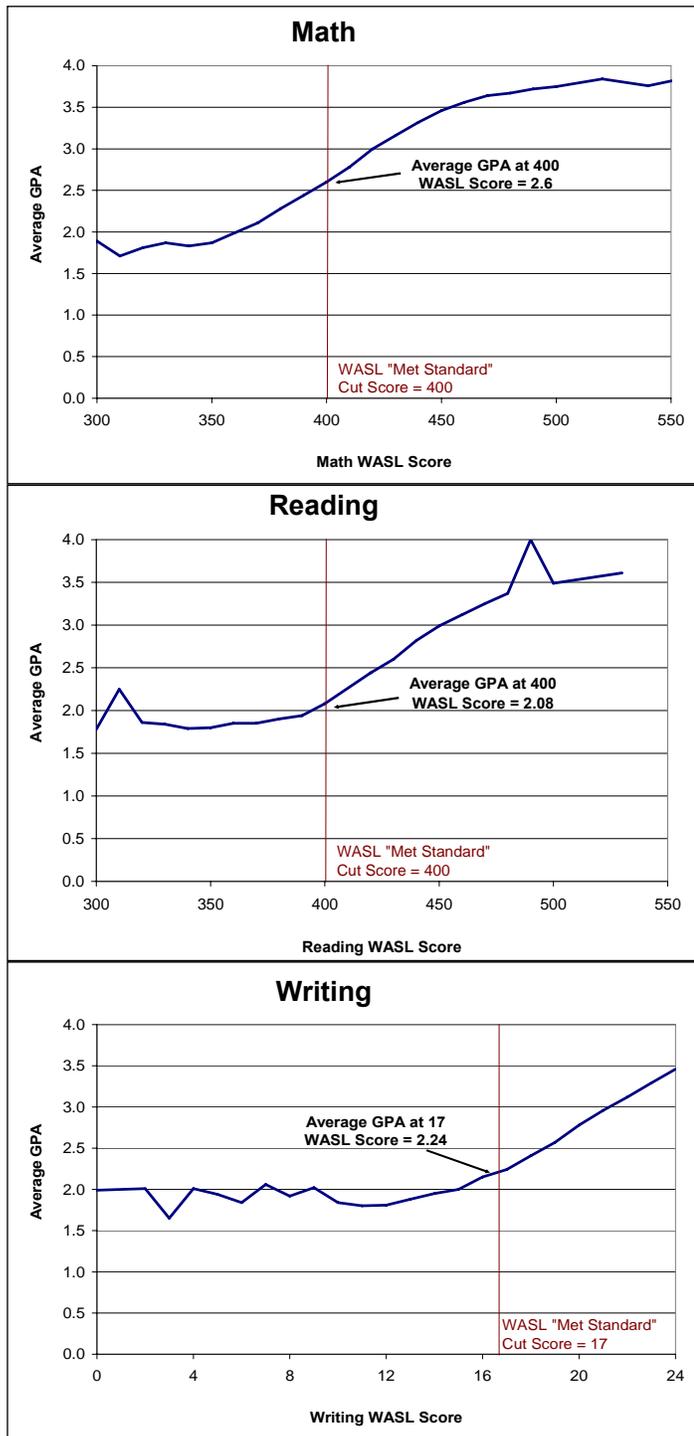
Similar to substitute exams, **grade-based options** have low potential to increase met-standard rates substantially. This finding applies to the overall GPA option as well as to the subject-area GPA cohort alternative currently authorized for use in Washington.

Comparable rigor between grades and WASL scores can be established by linking the GPA to the cut points for meeting standard on the WASL. An overall GPA option might do so by calculating the average GPA for all 10th-grade students who received a 400 on the reading and math assessments or a 17 on the writing assessment (the cut points for meeting standard on the WASL). The subject-area cohort GPA does so by calculating the average GPA of six or more students who met standard and took the same subject-area courses as a student who did not meet standard.

Linking average GPA to WASL cut scores means that, on average, comparable levels of academic skills and knowledge are required to achieve a GPA that "meets standard."

Together, Exhibits 11 and 12 illustrate the relationship between grades and WASL scores. Exhibit 11 plots average GPA by student scores on the spring 2006 10th-grade WASL in reading, writing, and math. As students' WASL scores increase, so does average GPA.

**Exhibit 11**  
**Average GPA by WASL Scores on the**  
**Spring 2006 10th-Grade WASL**

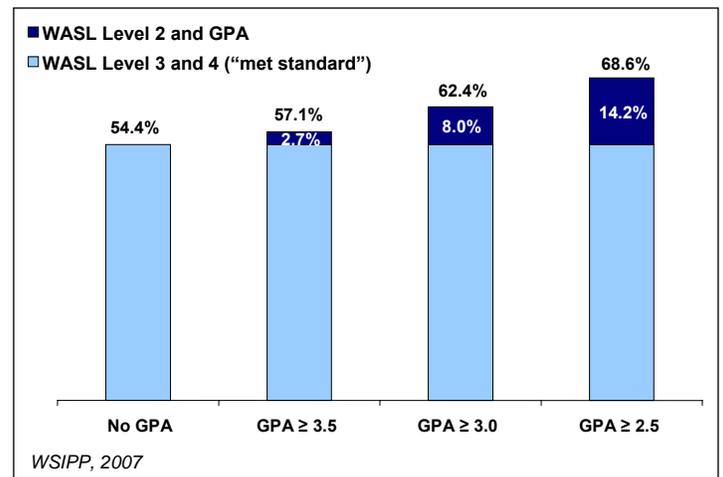


WSIPP, 2007

The average GPA for students whose scores on the math WASL equaled the “met-standard” cut point (400) is 2.6; the corresponding GPA for students who received a 400 on the reading WASL is 2.08. Finally, the average GPA for students who received a 17 on the writing WASL is 2.24.

Exhibit 12 illustrates the potential impact on met-standard rates for three hypothetical overall GPA thresholds. The first bar in Exhibit 12 shows that 54.4 percent of 10th-grade students who completed the spring 2006 WASL met standard in reading, writing, and math.

**Exhibit 12**  
**Overall Met-Standard Rates: Different GPA**  
**Thresholds Indexed to WASL Score**



The next three bars show how met-standard rates would increase if the graduation requirement were re-defined to include students who achieve a level 2 on the WASL and maintain a GPA of greater than or equal to 3.5, 3.0, and 2.5, respectively. If the GPA threshold were set at 3.5, an additional 2.7 percent of 10th-grade students in 2006 would have met standard. If the GPA threshold were set at 3.0, the met-standard rate would increase by 8 percentage points; at 2.5, the met-standard rate would have increased by 14.2 percent. This analysis demonstrates that lowering the GPA threshold would result in somewhat higher met-standard rates.

Another issue with using overall GPA as an alternative assessment is that grades may or may not measure student mastery of the state learning standards. Whether grades measure a student’s performance with respect to the EALRs depends on the classes he or she takes, as well as the

curriculum, instruction, and assessment measures used by teachers.<sup>28</sup>

The overall GPA measure includes grades from all the classes a student takes regardless of subject area and, therefore, may not be comparable in content or rigor to subject-area WASL assessments. The subject-area GPA cohort option includes a student's grades only in relevant subject-area courses (such as math); however, those classes do not necessarily align with 10th-grade-level standards.

The subject-area GPA cohort measure is less reliable than the overall GPA option, because it is based on fewer courses and fewer students. An overall GPA option examines the GPA of all students in a given grade, whereas the subject-area GPA cohort option is based on as few as six students and may include only a handful of high school math courses.

Additionally, tying grades to high school graduation could have the unintended consequence of inflating grades (i.e., artificially increasing average grades over time). Grade inflation poses the greatest problem for the subject-area GPA cohort option. Because the subject-area GPA is based on a small number of courses, an inflated grade in any one course would be influential. Conversely, inflated course grades would have a lesser impact on a student's overall GPA, which is based on a much larger number of courses.

The overall GPA and Washington's subject-area cohort GPA options also differ with respect to implementation costs and complexities. Exhibit 13 outlines key differences between the two options.

The overall GPA option would not incur any significant costs, because students' GPAs are already collected by school districts and reported to OSPI electronically. The subject-area GPA cohort option, however, necessitates collection and analysis of transcript data—not currently available electronically statewide—to calculate subject-specific GPAs. The initial cost of this option will therefore be relatively high, as school districts and the state invest in data system improvements.

### **Exhibit 13** **Two Grade-Based Options:** **Distinguishing Features**

	<b>GPA Subject-Area Cohort</b>	<b>Overall GPA</b>
Pre-determined minimum GPA	No	Yes
Courses included	Within subject area	All
Size of student comparison group	Small (within school)	Large (statewide)
Data currently collected electronically statewide	No	Yes
Potential for grade inflation	High	Low

The GPA subject-area cohort option also requires the identification of at least six students from the same school who took the same subject-area courses and who met standard on the WASL. This requirement limits the feasibility of this option for small districts. A 2006 pilot study of this option, a continuation of the extensive research conducted by the Center for Educational Policy Research for OSPI, found that 56 percent of sampled students in Washington schools did not have a comparison cohort available in math: fewer than six students in the schools these students attended took the same math classes and met standard on the WASL.<sup>29</sup>

### **Performance-Based and Diagnostic Options: Higher Potential to Increase Met-Standard Rates**

Alternative assessment options with a higher potential to increase met-standard rates include performance-based options (such as Washington's Collection of Evidence) and diagnostic segmented math exams.<sup>30</sup>

Comparable academic skills and knowledge are still required to perform well on these assessments, but these options are more closely tied to classroom instruction and, therefore, have the potential to provide useful feedback for teachers and students.

<sup>28</sup> Classroom-based assessments include measures such as quizzes, tests, and homework. Some teachers also consider factors such as student attendance in assigning grades.

<sup>29</sup> Center for Educational Policy Research. (2006). *Alternative assessment pilot project*. Eugene, OR: CEPR, Appendix K, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> The focus here is on math, because Washington's math met-standard rates are much lower than reading and writing met-standard rates.

For example, the **Collection of Evidence (COE)** is a compilation of classroom work samples prepared by students under teacher supervision. Students may revise most work samples that are deemed insufficient according to the COE guidelines.<sup>31</sup> This revision process may improve students' work and would thereby boost met-standard rates. Additionally, the content of the COE is designed to measure student mastery of the EALRs, and the process for compiling and scoring work samples has been standardized by OSPI.

Similarly, **segmented math exams** have the potential to increase met-standard rates because they are linked with classroom instruction and cover material that is taught in classes. In contrast, at present there is no guarantee that students have received instruction in the standards tested on the WASL. Currently, OSPI is developing segmented math exams as well as standardized math curricula and instruction materials.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, whereas the overall reading, writing, and math WASL exams are reliable measures of student learning, "strands" include an insufficient number of test items (questions) to diagnose strengths and weaknesses reliably.<sup>33</sup> For example, the math WASL measures whether students have mastered math EALRs generally, but does not reliably measure whether students are proficient in geometry or algebra. A diagnostic test would include a sufficient number of items in each strand to provide reliable feedback regarding specific math skills. If the segmented math exams are designed to be diagnostic, there may be potential to increase met-standard rates substantially.

Segmented math exams require some initial investment in test and curriculum development, but once implemented the ongoing costs would be relatively low. In contrast, the COE is a time-intensive assessment that requires teacher and student involvement in assigning, completing, and verifying work samples. School administrators must also verify that the COE represents the

student's work. Some school administrators consulted for this study stated that the intensity of work involved in the COE is difficult to sustain; others commented that having multiple, complex alternative assessment options is in itself a challenge for schools.

Exhibit 14 on the following page summarizes these findings regarding alternative assessment options reviewed to date. The options are grouped by their potential to increase met-standard rates.

## INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Some alternative assessment options are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, but their potential to increase met-standard rates may be low. Other options have a greater potential to increase met-standard rates, but may be more costly and complex to implement.

Therefore, the Institute recommends that **an assessment option's potential to improve student academic outcomes should be balanced with the costs and complexity of implementing it.** If options are comparable in terms of their potential to improve assessment outcomes—as well as their reliability, validity, rigor, and standardization—lower-cost alternatives are preferred to higher-cost options.

For example, both the Collection of Evidence and segmented math exam options have high potential to increase met-standard rates. However, the options vary in their costs and complexity: the COE is costly and difficult to implement, whereas segmented exams are easy to implement and, after some initial development costs, relatively inexpensive. Therefore, all else being equal, segmented exams are preferable to the COE.

Also, to reduce implementation complexities and minimize confusion for students, parents, and educators, the Institute recommends that **the total number of alternative assessments should be limited.** This recommendation is based on feedback the Institute received from various stakeholders (see the appendix).

The Institute also recommends that the state **consider adopting a math assessment alternative that is diagnostic.** For example, a segmented math WASL can be designed to include a sufficient number of content-area items to permit its use as a diagnostic assessment. Such an exam would have the potential to increase met-standard rates without

<sup>31</sup> Students may revise most, but not all, portions of the COE. They may not revise or receive help with the two "on-demand" work samples required as part of the COE. See: <<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/CAAoptions/pubdocs/CAAOptionsHandbook2007.pdf>>, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Direction in ESSB 6386 § 512 (2) (a), Chapter 372, Laws of 2006.

<sup>33</sup> For more information about WASL strands see W. Cole & R. Barnoski (2006). *Tenth-grade WASL strands: Student performance varies considerably over time.* Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. <<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/06-11-2205.pdf>>.

incurring prohibitive costs or logistical difficulties for schools or districts. To render this recommendation consistent with the preceding one, however, assessments with diagnostic capabilities should supplant alternative assessments that are either ineffective or more costly or complex to implement.

**2007 WORKPLAN**

Pursuant to its mandate to review alternatives to augment the state’s existing assessment system, the Institute will continue examining the cultural

appropriateness of alternative assessment options, including a review of the research literature, consultations with assessment experts and stakeholder groups, and analysis of assessment data.

The Institute will also review additional alternative options, including the General Educational Development (GED) credential, career skill certification exams, diagnostic tests such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and various “multiple measures” approaches. A final report is due December 1, 2007.

**Exhibit 14  
Alternative Assessment Options Review: Summary of Findings**

	<b>Comparable rigor</b>	<b>Comparable content</b>	<b>Reliable</b>	<b>Low costs</b>	<b>Easy to implement</b>	<b>Standardized process</b>
<b>Options with low potential to increase met-standard rates</b>						
Substitute exams*	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subject-Area GPA Cohort	Yes	Depends on curriculum and instruction	Yes	No (initial) Yes (ongoing)	No (initial) Yes (ongoing)	Yes
Overall GPA	Yes	Depends on curriculum and instruction	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Options with higher potential to increase met-standard rates</b>						
Collection of Evidence	Depends on implementation	Depends on implementation	Depends on implementation	No	No	Yes
Segmented math exams	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (initial) Yes (ongoing)	Yes	Yes

\* Substitute exams reviewed include: college admissions (PSAT/SAT/ACT), college placement (ASSET, COMPASS, ACCUPLACER), and comprehensive achievement tests (such as ITED and NAEP).

## APPENDIX: CONSULTATION PROCESS AND CONTENT SUMMARY

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Beginning in April 2006, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) invited individuals and organizations from throughout Washington State to provide input for a legislatively directed review of alternative assessment options for high school graduation.<sup>34</sup> This appendix describes the consultation process and summarizes input received from participants to date.

### Consultation Process

The 2006 Washington State Legislature directed the Institute to consult with a broad group of stakeholders to identify a list of possible alternative assessment options to augment the state's student assessment system. Exhibit A-1 displays relevant text from the legislation.

#### **Exhibit A-1 Legislative Bill Text: Study Consultations**

In SSB 6618 § 3, the 2006 Washington State Legislature directed the Institute to consult stakeholders and experts to identify alternative assessment options:

*“The institute shall consult, at a minimum, with nationally recognized experts on assessments including representatives from nationally recognized centers for multicultural education, representatives of the office of the superintendent of public instruction, educators, counselors, parents, the business community, classified employees, career and technical organizations, representatives of federally recognized Washington tribes, representatives of cultural, linguistic, and racial minority groups, and the community of persons with disabilities in developing the initial list of possible alternative assessment options, alternative assessment methods, procedures, or performance measures to be reviewed.”*

The first step in the consultation process was to identify organizations and individuals that fall under the categories listed in legislation. We identified organizations primarily through Internet searches and directories of education-related agencies, including public and private organizations. As we collected contact information, we also asked people to refer us to potentially interested colleagues.

For each organization or group identified, we invited at least one representative to participate in an email-based consultation process; for some organizations, multiple individuals elected to participate. Additionally, some participants are non-affiliated parents or community members we heard about, read about, or who contacted us expressing interest. Exhibit A-5 (at the end of this appendix) lists organizations and categories of individuals we contacted or who contacted us through this process.

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<sup>34</sup> SSB 6618, Chapter 352, Laws of 2006.

In April 2006, the Institute emailed all identified parties and asked whether the individual or organization was willing to assist with the development of a list of alternative assessment options. Most parties agreed to participate. In June 2006, the Institute emailed a detailed request for input to participants, who were asked to respond by August 31, 2006. Specifically, stakeholders were asked to provide the following details for each alternative assessment option identified:

- Name and description of the option;
- State where it is used or has been proposed;
- Target population;
- Research and data that address the review criteria;<sup>35</sup> and
- Suggestions for additional review criteria.

A reminder to provide input was emailed to participants in early August. A summary of identified assessment options was emailed to participants in September. An additional request for input was emailed to all public school superintendents in Washington in mid-October to increase the participation of local school representatives.

Exhibit A-2 on the following page lists the “universe” of options identified by participating stakeholders. The remainder of this appendix summarizes the input received to date regarding other issues raised by stakeholders.

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<sup>35</sup> The review criteria established by SSB 6618 are as follows: costs for implementation; cultural appropriateness; reliability in measuring a student’s ability to meet state learning standards; compliance with RCW 28A.655.061(1), which states that “alternative assessments for each content area shall be comparable in rigor to the skills and knowledge that the student must demonstrate on the Washington assessment of student learning”; challenges to implementation, including any legislative action necessary for implementation; and whether assessment procedures or methods could be standardized across the state.

**Exhibit A-2**  
**Alternative Assessment Options and Policies Identified by Stakeholders**

<b>Suggested Options</b>	<b>Examples/Details</b>
Performance-based	Completion of tasks, rather than tests, to demonstrate academic achievement. These tasks include (but are not limited to) oral presentations, written essays, hands-on activities, and collections of student work samples completed in class and/or independently.
Grade-based	Overall grade point average (GPA) or average course grades in certain subject areas or types of courses (such as core vs. elective).
Substitute exams: College admissions tests	PSAT, SAT, ACT.
Substitute exams: College placement tests	ASSET, COMPASS, ACCUPLACER.
Substitute exams: comprehensive K-12 achievement tests	National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Advanced Placement (AP) exams, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education, Cambridge International Examination, PASS tests (for home schooling), Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS).  Some stakeholders suggested the state use diagnostic assessments in general, without naming a specific test.
Substitute exams: Career skill certification exams	Industry-specific certification exams; ACT Workkeys is another Career and Technical Education (CTE) related option.
Substitute exams: General Educational Development (GED) credential	This GED option assumes that students would stay in school and graduate from high school after they obtain the GED credential.
Substitute exams: End-of-course exams	Exams administered at the end of specific courses by content area, including “segmented” math exams.
Substitute exams: Language tests	Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT).
<b>Policy Suggestions</b>	<b>Examples/Details</b>
Accommodations and test modifications	Translation of the WASL into other languages; untimed tests; Braille translation; “universal design” principles in test development to make assessments accessible to all students.
Locally chosen assessment	A localized assessment system structure, not limited to any one type of assessment.
Multiple measures approaches	The use of a combination of assessment results (such as grades indexed to exam scores) to determine students’ eligibility for high school graduation.

## Summary of Stakeholder Input

Stakeholders provided input via email, in person, and over the telephone. This summary describes the comments received by email, followed by a description of comments received orally.

### Email Input

As of December 2006, the Institute received 80 emails commenting on the WASL and alternative assessments from stakeholders and organizations. More than half (n=52, 65 percent) of the emails were from parents. The remainder were from school district superintendents, administrators, and teachers (n=17) or representatives of statewide organizations (n=11). These figures do not include emails received by the Institute that contained questions about the study rather than information or opinions.

**Most Frequent Comments.** All but two of the 80 emails received from stakeholders were critical of use of the WASL as an exit exam for high school graduation and/or to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for schools and districts under federal law (the No Child Left Behind Act).

Exhibit A-3 on the following page displays counts of email input organized by category and stakeholder group (stakeholders were categorized as follows: (1) parents, (2) school administrators and teachers, and (3) representatives of statewide associations, advocacy groups, or researchers).

The most frequent comments received from all three groups covered the following:<sup>36</sup>

- Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests like Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) should be used instead of the WASL for diagnostic and accountability purposes (38 comments);
- The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources and, therefore, costs more to administer than nationally available K–12 assessment tests (23 comments on time and 16 comments on cost);
- The WASL is unreliable, invalid, and/or has the wrong math content or format (20 comments on reliability/validity and 15 comments about math content).

**Caveat on Content of Email Input.** This summary of email input should be interpreted with the following information in mind. Fourteen of the 17 emails received from school administrators and teachers advocated in favor of the MAP assessment using the same email text or language, suggesting that each individual did not write the input on their own. Similarly, at least 14 of the 52 emails from parents contained identical or very similar information and language, again suggesting that the language was shared among some stakeholders prior to sending emails to the Institute.

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<sup>36</sup> These comments are stakeholder views, not judgments of the Institute.

**Exhibit A-3**  
**Frequency of Emails Received by Comment Category and Stakeholder Group**

	<b>All (N=80)</b>	<b>Parents (N=52)</b>	<b>School administrators and teachers (N=17)</b>	<b>Associations, researchers, and advocacy groups (N=11)</b>
Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests should be used instead of WASL for AYP in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, or in general	<b>38 (48%)</b>	<b>22 (42%)</b>	<b>13 (76%)</b>	<b>3 (27%)</b>
The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources	<b>23 (29%)</b>	<b>18 (35%)</b>	<b>4 (24%)</b>	<b>1 (9%)</b>
The WASL is not reliable, valid, and/or focuses on the wrong content	<b>20 (25%)</b>	<b>16 (31%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>4 (36%)</b>
WASL implementation costs are higher than costs of other tests	<b>16 (20%)</b>	<b>13 (25%)</b>	<b>2 (12%)</b>	<b>1 (9%)</b>
WASL math is the “wrong math” and/or students are not being adequately instructed in math	<b>15 (19%)</b>	<b>13 (25%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>2 (18%)</b>
WASL results’ turnaround time is inadequate for use as diagnostic tool	<b>14 (18%)</b>	<b>12 (23%)</b>	<b>1 (6%)</b>	<b>1 (9%)</b>
The WASL should not be used as a high stakes test for high school graduation	<b>11 (14%)</b>	<b>8 (15%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>3 (27%)</b>
The WASL has a negative impact on children’s self-esteem and confidence (especially for special education students)	<b>11 (14%)</b>	<b>10 (19%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>1 (9%)</b>
The WASL is culturally inappropriate	<b>5 (6%)</b>	<b>2 (4%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>3 (27%)</b>
Alternative assessments are important, but the number of options should be limited to manage logistical complexity	<b>2 (3%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>2 (12%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
WASL maintains high standards for all students and should be continued	<b>2 (3%)</b>	<b>1 (2%)</b>	<b>1 (6%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
Collection of Evidence implementation is problematic	<b>2 (3%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>1 (6%)</b>	<b>1 (9%)</b>

**Intensity of Comments.** We also analyzed email input according to the degree to which each category was emphasized by stakeholders. To do so, we assigned points to each category based on how many times and whether each topic was mentioned as a first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth topic in stakeholder emails.<sup>37</sup>

This intensity analysis confirms the frequency analysis. Concerns about reliability, validity, costs, and the use of the WASL as a high stakes test are of high priority for all groups. The suggestion that the WASL should be replaced—at least in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8—with nationally available, diagnostic, norm-referenced standardized tests such as the MAP or ITBS was the single most frequent and strongly emphasized category of stakeholder input.

This analysis also reveals that certain concerns are more or less intense for different groups based on those who responded, for example:

- School administrators are more concerned than other stakeholder groups about the logistical complexity of implementing multiple alternative assessment options, including the Collection of Evidence. Administrators and teachers also commented with greater intensity on other implementation issues such as costs and time taken away from instruction.
- Parents and researchers/statewide groups emphasized concerns about the reliability, validity, content, and format of the WASL with greater intensity than school district employees. These two groups also commented with greater frequency and intensity on the negative impacts of the WASL on children’s emotional well-being.

Exhibit A-4 on the following two pages displays data from the intensity analysis. For each comment, higher assigned points indicate greater emphasis among participating stakeholders.

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<sup>37</sup> For each email, the first category emphasized was assigned 11 points; the second 9 points; the third 7 points; the fourth 5 points; the fifth 3 points; and the sixth 1 point. The frequency of each category was multiplied by the assigned emphasis rating to calculate the total points and thus rank categories by intensity.

**Exhibit A-4**  
**Comment Categories Listed in Order of Intensity by Stakeholder Groups**

<b>Parents (N=52)</b>	<b>Assigned Points</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests should be used instead of WASL for AYP in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, or in general	192	1
The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources	172	2
The WASL is not reliable, valid, and/or focuses on the wrong content	156	3
WASL math is the “wrong math” and/or students are not being adequately instructed in math	113	5
The WASL has a negative impact on children’s self-esteem and confidence (especially for special education students)	92	6
WASL implementation costs are higher than costs of other tests	91	7
The WASL should not be used as a high stakes test for high school graduation	84	8
WASL results’ turnaround time is inadequate for use as diagnostic tool	64	9
The WASL should be continued because it maintains high standards for all students	11	10
Alternative assessments are important, but the number of options should be limited to manage logistical complexity	0	n/a
Collection of Evidence implementation is problematic	0	n/a
<b>School Administrators and Teachers (N=17)</b>	<b>Assigned Points</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests should be used instead of WASL for AYP in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, or in general	137	1
The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources	36	2
Alternative assessments are important, but the number of options should be limited to manage logistical complexity	22	3
WASL implementation costs are higher than costs of other tests	20	4
Collection of Evidence implementation is problematic	11	5
WASL results’ turnaround time is inadequate for use as diagnostic tool	9	6
The WASL should be continued because it maintains high standards for all students	7	8
The WASL should not be used as a high stakes test for high school graduation	0	n/a
The WASL has a negative impact on children’s self-esteem and confidence (especially for special education students)	0	n/a
The WASL is not reliable, valid, and/or focuses on the wrong content	0	n/a
WASL math is the “wrong math” and/or students are not being adequately instructed in math	0	n/a

**Exhibit A-4, continued**  
**Comment Categories Listed in Order of Intensity by Stakeholder Groups**

<b>Researchers, Associations, and Advocacy Groups (N=11)</b>	<b>Assigned Points</b>	<b>Rank</b>
The WASL is not reliable, valid, and/or focuses on the wrong content	44	1
Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests should be used instead of WASL for AYP in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, or in general	27	2
The WASL should not be used as a high stakes test for high school graduation	25	3
WASL results' turnaround time is inadequate for use as diagnostic tool	11	4
The WASL has a negative impact on children's self-esteem and confidence (especially for special education students)	9	6
WASL math is the "wrong math" and/or students are not being adequately instructed in math	9	6
Collection of Evidence implementation is problematic	9	6
The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources	9	6
WASL implementation costs are higher than costs of other tests	7	10
Alternative assessments are important, but the number of options should be limited to manage logistical complexity	0	n/a
The WASL should be continued because it maintains high standards for all students	0	n/a
<b>All (N=80)</b>	<b>Assigned Points</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Diagnostic norm-referenced standardized tests should be used instead of WASL for AYP in grades 3, 5, 6, 8, or in general	356	1
The WASL requires too much class time and curriculum resources	217	2
The WASL is not reliable, valid, and/or focuses on the wrong content	200	3
WASL math is the "wrong math" and/or students are not being adequately instructed in math	122	5
WASL implementation costs are higher than costs of other tests	118	6
The WASL should not be used as a high stakes test for high school graduation	109	7
The WASL has a negative impact on children's self-esteem and confidence (especially for special education students)	101	8
WASL results' turnaround time is inadequate for use as diagnostic tool	84	9
Alternative assessments are important, but the number of options should be limited to manage logistical complexity	22	10
Collection of Evidence implementation is problematic	20	11
The WASL should be continued because it maintains high standards for all students	18	12

## Other Stakeholder Comments

In meetings, over the telephone, and in other formats, stakeholders also commented on assessment administration policies, the impacts of current policy on curriculum and instruction, the achievement gap and cultural appropriateness, career and technical education, the WASL writing and math exams, and principles of universal design.

### Assessment Administration Policies

**Attendance Requirements.** One stakeholder group raised concern over state policy that gives schools discretion to use student attendance as an eligibility requirement for taking the WASL. The concern is that schools may use attendance as a way to exclude low-achieving students from taking the WASL in order to increase average WASL scores.

**Remediation Requirements.** One stakeholder group raised concern that giving school districts discretion to require students to take remedial courses to be eligible for retakes will limit access to retaking and, therefore, meeting standard on the WASL.

**“Take the WASL Twice” Rule.** Some stakeholders want to change the policy that students must take the WASL twice before pursuing an alternative assessment option because of the perceived detrimental impact the WASL has on students’ self-esteem and confidence.

**Appeals Process.** One parent believes the WASL score appeals process timeline is overly long and stated that parents’ access to student exams for review is limited.

**Accommodations.** One educational researcher stated that more research is needed to understand the impacts that accommodations have on special education students’ development and academic performance.

### Impact on Curriculum and Instruction

One stakeholder group raised concerns about the impact of the WASL on school curriculum. The concern is that in response to the high stakes nature of the WASL regarding high school graduation and AYP, curriculum and instruction is becoming more narrowly focused on reading, writing, and math as tested on the WASL to the exclusion of other subjects and outcomes.

### Achievement Gap and Cultural Appropriateness

Some stakeholder groups stated that high stakes testing should be postponed until the achievement gap is eliminated—that is, when there are not large differences in WASL results among racial/ethnic and economic groups. Many stakeholders believe that students are being unfairly held accountable for poor WASL performance when they have not been given sufficient opportunity to learn. Additionally, some stakeholders commented that the process for developing state learning standards and the WASL itself does not sufficiently address cultural appropriateness.

## **Career and Technical Education Assessment**

One stakeholder group suggested that, for the implementation of the Collection of Evidence (COE) for career and technical education (CTE) students, the state should create “Career Pathway Performance Assessments” (CPPA) that include guidelines and protocols for CTE-specific COEs covering five state-identified career pathways.<sup>38</sup>

## **WASL Writing Exam**

One stakeholder group provided specific ideas about how to alter the WASL writing exam to improve validity. These ideas included the suggestion that the WASL writing assessment be classroom-based.

## **WASL Math Exam**

Two stakeholders stated that the WASL math exam should be altered because it does not align with Bloom’s Taxonomy levels, which is a “behavioral model of cognitive development.”<sup>39</sup>

## **Universal Design**

One stakeholder commented that any assessment used in K–12 education should be designed based on principles of “universal design” and stated that the WASL is not developed according to those principles.<sup>40</sup>

Exhibit A-5, which begins on the following page, lists the organizations and categories of individuals who participated in the consultation process.

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<sup>38</sup> These stakeholders indicated that this option would align with CTE program requirements under the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006.

<sup>39</sup> D. Orlich. (2005). *The WASL: A critical report to interested citizens of the state of Washington*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University. Available at: <[http://nwpe.org/PDF\\_Files/The\\_WASL\\_A\\_Critical\\_Report.pdf](http://nwpe.org/PDF_Files/The_WASL_A_Critical_Report.pdf)>.

<sup>40</sup> For more information about universal design, see: S.J. Thompson, C.J. Johnstone, & M.L. Thurlow. (2002). *Universal design applied to large scale assessments (Synthesis Report 44)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. Retrieved November 16, 2006 from: <<http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/OnlinePubs/Synthesis44.html>>.

**Exhibit A-5**  
**Participants in Consultations Regarding Assessment Policies and Options**

ACT	Teachers and administrators from local school districts
Alliance for Education	Team Child
American Civil Liberties Union of Washington	Technology Alliance
American Educational Research Association	The Children's Alliance
American Electronics Association Washington Council	The Evergreen State College
Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Transitions Math Project
Association of Washington Business	Tribal Leaders Congress on Education
Association of Washington School Principals	Tulalip Tribes
Austin Consulting	University of Puget Sound
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	University of Washington
Braille Access Center	Washington Association for Career and Technical Education
Center on Reinventing Public Education	Washington Association for Learning Alternatives
Citizens United for Responsible Education	Washington Association of School Administrators
Columbia Legal Services	Washington Association of Student Councils
Colville Tribe	Washington Association of Vocational Administrators
Educational Policy Improvement Center	Washington Council of the Blind
Equitable Opportunities in Education Caucus	Washington Education Association
Evergreen Freedom Foundation	Washington Educational Research Association
First Place School	Washington Learning First Alliance
Governor Booth Gardner representatives	Washington Learns
Governor's Office of Indian Affairs	Washington Roundtable
Higher Education Coordinating Board	Washington School Counselor Association
International Education Coalition	Washington School for the Blind
League of Education Voters	Washington School for the Deaf
Learning Disabilities Association	Washington School Research Center
Mathematics Education Collaborative	Washington Sensory Disabilities Services
Mothers Against the WASL	Washington State Association for Multicultural Education
NAACP, Bremerton	Washington State Association of School Psychologists
National Federation of the Blind Washington	Washington State Association of the Deaf
Northwest Evaluation Association	Washington State Chamber of Commerce Executives
Northwest Justice Project	Washington State Commission on African American Affairs
Northwest Professional Educators	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory	Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Office of Financial Management staff	Washington State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, including racial/ethnic/income group "think tanks"	Washington State House of Representatives members and staff
Parent Empowerment Network	Washington State Indian Education Association
Parents and community members	Washington State Parent Teacher Association
Partnership for Learning	Washington State School Directors' Association
Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe	Washington State Self Help for Hard of Hearing
Professional Educator Standards Board	Washington State Senate members and staff
Public School Employees of Washington	Washington State Special Education Coalition
Refugee and Immigrant Parent Advocacy Network	Washington State Technology Education Association
Runyan & Associates Educational Consulting	Washington State University
Seattle University School of Law	Washington Workforce Association
Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus & Mary	Western Washington University
Stanford University	Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	
State Board of Education	
Suquamish Tribe	
Targeted Alliances	



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*Washington State  
Institute for  
Public Policy*

The Washington State Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors—representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities—governs the Institute and guides the development of all activities. The Institute's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.