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Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about the correlation between secondary state writing test performance and academic success in post-secondary institutions. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

**Question:** *What is the correlation between performance on secondary level state writing tests and academic success in post-secondary institutions?*

### **Search Process**

**Key words and search strings used in the search:** *writing test AND high school AND college; state writing tests AND college OR post secondary; standardized writing tests AND college success*

### **Search databases and websites:**

1. ERIC, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar, [www.google.com/scholar](http://www.google.com/scholar)
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources, <http://ies.ed.gov>
5. What Works Clearinghouse, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

### **Sample Citations Retrieved:**

Amrein, A.L. & Berliner, D.C. (2002). High-stakes testing and student learning. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(18), 1-74. Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>.

**Abstract/Summary:** Studied 18 states with high-stakes testing to see if their programs were affecting student learning, analyzing results from additional tests covering some of the same domain as each state's own test. Findings suggest that in all but one case, student learning is indeterminate, remains at the same level, or actually decreases with the implementation of high-stakes testing.

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Bridgeman, B. (1991). Essays and multiple-choice tests as predictors of college freshman GPA. *Research in Higher Education*, 32, 319-332. doi: 10.1007/BF00992895

**Abstract/Summary:** This study at 21 colleges found that having entering freshmen write a short holistically scored essay added nothing to the prediction of freshman grade point average compared to predictions made from high school grade point average, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, and a multiple-choice test of writing-related skills

Collins, E. (2008). Success in college: From C's in high school to A's in college (review). *Journal of College Student Development* 49, 77-79. doi: 10.1353/csd.2008.0007

**Abstract/Summary:** This article offers strategies and advice students can use to flourish academically in college. Burns provides first hand perspectives on the most important factors he believes to affect student learning and grades. He also makes suggestions on what students should expect from college, how to mentally prepare, and how to approach each semester by offering them tips on scheduling, studying, and writing.

Conley, D. T. (2010). *College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. doi: 10.1002/9781118269411

**Abstract/Summary:** This book offers educators a blueprint for improving high school so that more students are able to excel in freshman-level college courses or entry-level jobs-laying a solid foundation for lifelong growth and success. The book is filled with detailed, practical guidelines and case descriptions of what the best high schools are doing. This book includes clear guidelines for high school faculty to adapt their programs of instruction in the direction of enhanced college/career readiness; provides practical strategies for improving students' content knowledge and academic behaviors; offers examples of best practices and research-based recommendations for change; and considers the impact of behavioral issues-such as time management and study habits-as well as academic skills on college readiness.

Droogsma Musoba, G. (2011). Accountability policies and readiness for college for diverse students. *Educational Policy*, 25, 451-487. doi: 10.1177/0895904810361721

**Abstract/Summary:** Following a national trend, state policy has focused on accountability measures such as high-stakes high school exit exams, standards-based reforms, and graduation curriculum requirements. Yet the effect of these accountability policies on students' readiness for college is relatively untested. In a multilevel model (students within states), the study asked,

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“Are accountability school reform policies positively or negatively associated with readiness for college for students from different ethnic and income groups?” Exit exam policies and degree of implementation of state standards were not significantly related to academic readiness as measured by composite SAT scores. Math graduation numeric curriculum requirements were negatively related to SAT score for Whites.

Hansen, K., Reeve, S., Gonzalez, J., Sudweeks, R. R., Hatch, G. L., Esplin, P., & Bradshaw, W. S. (2006). Are advanced placement English and first-year college composition equivalent? A comparison of outcomes in the writing of three groups of sophomore college students. *Research in the Teaching of English, 40*, 461-501.

**Abstract/Summary:** This study was conducted to obtain empirical data to inform policy decisions about exempting incoming students from a first-year composition (FYC) course on the basis of Advanced Placement (AP) English exam scores. It examined the effect of avoiding first-year writing on the writing abilities of sophomore undergraduates. Two three-page writing samples were obtained from a subset of 182 sophomore students enrolled in a history of civilization course. Each essay was scored holistically by two readers; the average score across the two papers was used as an index of writing competence. Those who had taken an AP English course and a suitable FYC course performed significantly better than those who had only AP English or only FYC; both latter groups performed less than adequately on the tasks measured. These results indicate that exempting students from college writing based on work done in high school may be unwise because more instruction in writing at college appears to solidify student learning. First-year writing courses that build on strong college preparatory work may best prepare students for writing expected in other college classes. The College Board's support for writing, demonstrated by its including writing on the SAT and founding the National Commission on Writing, appears inconsistent with the aims of its Advanced Placement English program, which may encourage students to take less writing in college by exempting them from FYC altogether.

Holme, J., Richards, M., Jimerson, J., & Cohen, R. (2010). Assessing the effects of high school exit examinations. *Review of Educational Research, 80*, 476-526. doi: 10.3102/0034654310383147

**Abstract/Summary:** High school exit exams are affecting a growing majority of high school students. Although exit testing policies were enacted with the goal of improving student achievement as well as postsecondary outcomes, they also have the potential for negative effects. To better understand the effects of exit testing policies, in this article the authors systematically review 46 unique studies that pertain to four domains of expected influence: student achievement, graduation, postsecondary outcomes, and school response. The evidence reviewed

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indicates that exit tests have produced few of the expected benefits and have been associated with costs for the most disadvantaged students. This review suggests policy modifications that may attenuate some of the negative effects.

Jacob, B. (2001). Getting tough? The impact of high school graduation exams. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23, 99-121. doi: 10.3102/01623737023002099

**Abstract/Summary:** The impact of high school graduation exams on student achievement and dropout rates is examined. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), this analysis is able to control for prior student achievement and a variety of other student, school, and state characteristics. It was found that graduation tests have no significant impact on 12th-grade math or reading achievement. These results are robust with a variety of specification checks. Although graduation tests have no appreciable effect on the probability of dropping out for the average student, they increase the probability of dropping out among the lowest ability students. These results suggest that policymakers would be well advised to rethink current graduation test policies.

National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges. (2006). *Writing and school reform, including the neglected "r": The need for a writing revolution*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/writingcom/writing-school-reform-natl-comm-writing.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/writingcom/writing-school-reform-natl-comm-writing.pdf)

**Abstract/Summary:** This report is the result of five hearings held around the country to discuss the importance of writing, how to improve teaching and learning in this critical domain, and the future work of the National Commission on Writing. Reflecting the advice and experience of several hundred parents, teachers, school administrators, university presidents, association heads, foundation representatives, and state and local officials, the group's fourth report to Congress lays out a series of recommendations to keep writing at the center of education reform. The report was published with a reprint of *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*.

Radcliffe, R. A., & Stephens, L. C. (2010). Writing marathons help build middle school students' college aspirations and strengthen their literacy skills. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 83, 20-25. doi: 10.1080/00098650903267719

**Abstract/Summary:** Young adolescents' low scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) force the question of whether these students will be ready for college in four years. Our efforts to build a college-going culture emphasize strengthening students' writing

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skills by using preservice teachers to lead writing marathons for at-risk middle school students on university visits. Structured interviews, surveys, and written reflections reveal that what students write about changes with age, their motivation to write varies, and their college aspirations and perceptions become more positive after completing several annual writing marathons on a college campus. The writing marathon structure makes the college visit truly meaningful to students, and it provides a compelling incentive to write by supporting characteristics of middle school students, as defined by the National Middle School Association (National Middle School Association [NMSA] 2003). The marathon model focuses on four key elements: setting, timing, small groups, and writers' level of commitment.

Roth, J., Crans, G. G., Carter, R. L., Ariet, M., & Resnick, M. B. (2001). Effect of high school course-taking and grades on passing a college placement test. *High School Journal*, 84, 72-87.

**Abstract/Summary:** Transcripts of 19,736 students who consecutively attended Florida high schools for four years and graduated in the spring of 1994 were analyzed to determine how course choice, grades, tenth grade standardized test score results, race, and gender affected performance on a computerized placement test (CPT) administered upon entry to community college in the fall of 1994. A High School Performance (HSP) variable for math and English was constructed to account for differences in number of courses completed, degree of course difficulty, and course grade. Math and English HSP, 4-year cumulative grade point average (GPA), percentile rank on Grade Ten Assessment Test (GTAT) in math and reading, race and gender all had significant effects on the probability of passing the CPT. Math HSP had a larger positive effect on passing the Math CPT than GPA or GTAT. This was not the case for the Reading or Writing CPT subtests where GTAT had the larger effect and the magnitude of English HSP and GPA was about equal. Students can raise the probability of passing the Math CPT if they take more difficult math courses in high school, even at the expense of lowering their GPA.

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## Referrals

- Community College Research Center: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>
- The National Writing Project: <http://www.nwp.org/>
- Center for Educational Policy Research: <http://cepr.uoregon.edu/publications;>
- College Readiness Project: [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/\\_e-assesscollegereadiness.aspx;](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/_e-assesscollegereadiness.aspx)
- Educational Policy Improvement Center: <http://www.epiconline.org/>
- The National High School Center (<http://www.betterhighschools.org/>)
- National Assessment of Educational Progress: The Nation's Report Card: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>
  
- **Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at:** <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- **What Works Clearinghouse:** <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

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