Beyond The Test: Community And District Support for Postsecondary Enrollment

Do existing high school exit exams and end of course tests serve as a “pipeline” to higher education? The answer is no, according to a study released by the Washington-based Center on Education Policy (CEP) earlier this year. It’s Different Now: How Exit Exams are Affecting Teaching and Learning in Jackson and Austin,¹ is one of the first studies to look at the impact of state mandated testing at the district and community level. The study is important as Ohio is now considering new college readiness and end of course assessments.

Jackson, Mississippi and Austin, Texas were chosen because they represented urban districts with high numbers of students of color and because both districts were home to several institutions of higher education enabling researchers to look at impacts on college access. Here is what they found:

- Colleges and universities in both states did not typically pay attention to results on the state exit exams in admissions decisions.
- Districts, community organizations, and local colleges did provide a variety of other supports to encourage and get students ready to enroll in postsecondary education.

These supports were separate from in-district programs to help students pass exit exams and included the following:

- Expansion of Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- Dual-enrollment initiatives that enable high school students to take college courses.
- Workshops on college applications and financial aid.
- In Austin, a partnership with the local community college to guarantee admission to all graduates of the school district.

Interestingly, similar programs on dual credit, college applications and financial aide and college admission have been put into effect in Stark County by the Stark County Educational Service Center, our districts, our higher education institutions, and the Partnership’s Ohio College Access Network initiative.