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Inside this Brief

- **Background**
- **Certificate of Initial Mastery**
- **Assessments**
- **Certificate of Advanced Mastery**
- **New Diploma Requirements**
- **Abolishing CIM/CAM**
- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

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Background Brief on...

K-12 Education Reform

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Background

The Education Act for the 21st Century was enacted in 1991, and was amended significantly in 1995 and 2003. The original bill, HB 3565, was, in part, a response to the publication of *A Nation At Risk*,¹ which called for fundamental reforms of education without which the country was at risk of losing its preeminence in science, commerce and technological innovation.

The act, as amended, contains a number of provisions:

- ◆ State standards for academic subjects
- ◆ State assessments in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10
- ◆ Certificates of mastery. A *Certificate of Initial Mastery* is awarded to those students that, through work samples and statewide tests, demonstrate academic achievement. A *Certificate of Advanced Mastery* (not yet implemented) is to be awarded to those students who achieve most of the CIM requirements and have career-related experiences.
- ◆ Fully-funded pre-kindergarten program by 2004 (original date was 1998)
- ◆ The *Oregon Report Card*, reflecting each schools' and each districts' progress in meeting the goals of the Act
- ◆ School-based education reform advisory committees, *21st Century Schools Councils*
- ◆ Rule waivers for schools, granting more creative flexibility

While the Education Act contained a variety of provisions, most people focus on the Certificates of Initial and Advanced Mastery, state standards, and state assessments.

Certificate of Initial Mastery

To receive a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), students must show proficiency in English (speaking, writing, reading), science and mathematics through test scores and work samples. School districts may offer endorsements to the CIM in the subject areas of physical education, arts, health, history, geography, economics, civics, and second languages. The Oregon Department of Education must develop academic content standards in all these areas. The department must also

¹ <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>

provide assessments in the areas of English, mathematics, science, history, geography, economics, and civics. Local school districts are free to develop their own assessments, based on state standards, in the subjects of physical education, health, the arts, and second languages.

Benefits of the CIM include greater standardization across the state in school curriculum, clearer consensus in what students should know, and school accountability through test scores that measure student performance.

Education officials have worked to make the CIM more valuable. By earning a CIM, students have met four out of ten PASS (future college entrance exam) standards in English, math, and science. Some employers are now giving greater weight to job applicants with a CIM, as well.

Assessments

State law requires statewide assessments in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. However, to meet the federal requirements under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), the Oregon Department of Education will develop annual assessments for grades 3 through 10 by the 2005-06 school year.

Tests are standardized and criterion-referenced, which means that students are compared to a set standard, not to other students (no grading "curve"). Tests are multiple-choice, math problem-solving (story problems), and essay. The percentage of students meeting state standards as measured by state assessments and receiving a CIM continues to grow.

% of Students Meeting Standards

Year/test	1997	2003
3rd grade reading	79%	86%
3rd grade math	63%	79%
5th grade reading	67%	80%
5th grade math	59%	79%
5th grade writing	59%	-----
5th grade math problem- solving	32%	-----
8th grade reading	56%	63%
8th grade math	49%	61%
8th grade writing	69%	-----
8th grade problem- solving	32%	-----
10th grade reading	49%	53%
10th grade math	30%	43%
10th grade writing	74%	82%
10th grade math problem- solving	23%	51%

In addition to test scores, students must submit CIM-caliber work samples, graded by their teacher.

The Oregon Department of Education has developed an on-line, on-demand assessment, through its Technology-Enhanced Student Assessment (TESA). TESA has a number of advantages, including reduced need for paperwork, testing whenever students feel ready, storage of student records, greater test security, and immediate access to results. With TESA, students may take the test as often as they wish.

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) is to "prepare each student for successful transitions to his or her next steps" such as college, workforce entry, and the military. Not yet implemented, schools are first required to offer students the opportunity to earn a CAM in 2008.

Students must complete a variety of tasks before they are awarded a CAM:

- *Develop an education plan and build an education profile.* Students must identify personal, academic, and evolving career interests. Students develop, review and update their learning plan in preparation for post-high school next steps. Students build their education profile by documenting their progress and achievement.
- *Meet the performance standard for extended application through a collection of evidence.* Students must meet the extended application standard: Apply academic and career-related knowledge and skills in new and complex situations appropriate to the student's personal, academic, and/or career interests and post-high school goals.
- *Demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills.* Students must meet the career-related learning standards in personal management, problem solving, communication, teamwork, employment foundations, and career development.
- *Participate in career-related learning experiences as outlined in the education plan.* Students must connect classroom learning with real life experiences in the workplace, community, or school relevant to their personal, academic, and evolving career interests and post-high school goals.
- *Meet specific Certificate of Initial Mastery performance standards in English, mathematics, and science through CIM assessment options.* Students must meet the CIM performance standards in the English knowledge and skills test and work samples

and in mathematics and science through the CIM work samples or knowledge and skills tests.

New Diploma Requirements

The State Board of Education adopted new diploma requirements in March 2002, and are required for students graduating in the 2006-07 school year. These four new requirements also meet CAM requirements.

- Students must develop an education plan and build an education profile.
- Students must build a collection of evidence, or include evidence in existing collections, to demonstrate extended application.
- Students must demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills.
- Students must participate in career-related learning experiences as outlined in the education plan; identify learning outcomes and reflect on learning.

Abolishing CIM/CAM

There have been several bills introduced in the Legislature over the years that proposed to abolish elements of the reform provisions.

In the 2003 Legislative Session, HB 2415 proposed to eliminate the certificates of mastery, but retained state standards and testing. The bill received three public hearings, but failed to be enacted. Those testifying in favor of the bill gave the following reasons for eliminating the certificates:

- Students, teachers, administrators do not support the CIM/CAM.
- Colleges are not interested in CIM/CAM.
- Accountability will be maintained through the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act; there is no need to go beyond the federal requirements.
- National, standardized tests could be used, rather than spend money creating unique tests for Oregon, preventing the comparison of Oregon students and students in other states.
- The system is costly and time-consuming.
- The public has no faith that the tests accurately measure student achievement and progress.

Supporters of the law made the following arguments:

- National tests do not align with state standards and would violate the requirements of NCLB, possibly jeopardizing federal funds.
- Money saved by using national tests would not be significant as the state assessments have been created and curriculum aligned with those tests.
- The state would have no control over future costs if “off-the-shelf” tests were used.
- Completion of the CIM is valuable as it has been shown to be a strong predictor of college performance.
- Testing does not take significant classroom time and makes schools accountable.
- The ability to test students on-line provides instant results and may assist teachers and students.

In response to cost concerns, the 2003 Legislature enacted HB 2744. That bill narrowed the subjects required for a CIM to those required by the NCLB (English, math, science) and postponed the CAM implementation date four years, to 2008. Subjects that were eliminated may be added to the certificate as endorsements.

Schools are still required to offer instruction in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, economics, civics, physical education, health, the arts, and second languages.

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