

Minimum education standards demanded

United Press International
High school graduates who can't write or read very well get credit for the big new movement on the school scene — the minimal competency movement.

Why should such students graduate, asks the man in the street. What were they taught? Why were

they promoted from grade to grade? Who did the teaching? What's a high school diploma stand for? Those are some of the questions behind the movement that as of June 1 has initiated minimal competency standards for public schools in 24 states.

The actions by state legislatures and state boards of education have been coupled with pressure from parents, taxpayers, teachers, school administrators and even local board of education members.

The movement means business. A report at the annual meeting of the Education Commission of the

United States last week showed most agreement seems to be in the need to establish minimal competency in reading.

"Reading is mentioned in all but two of the states — Louisiana and New Hampshire," reported Chris Pipho, associate director of the commission.

"Mathematics appears to be left out only by Maryland while communication skills are not mentioned in Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Maryland and New Jersey.

"Life skills come in for mention in Florida and survival skills in Rhode Island. Colorado leaves the whole

identification of basic skills to the local districts.

"California and Florida allow local districts to add subject areas at their discretion."

The smorgasbord on the minimal competency front also includes:

Florida and California enacted laws permitting early exit from high school. However, only California has implemented the program. Florida's plan starts in the fall. High school students who reach a certain level on the General Educational Development test will be allowed early exit.

Thirteen of the 24 states with

minimal competency testing standards say students must pass minimal competency tests or they won't get a high school diploma. These include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Idaho, Maryland, Nevada, New York, New Mexico, Oregon, and Vermont.

Grade promotion appears to be a requirement in only three states: Arizona, 8th grade; Maryland, grades 2 to 12 in reading.

Florida, legislation calls for competency tests for promotion at all grade levels but in effect the testing probably be tied to grade pro-

motions at grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. Identification of students needing remedial assistance is a common element in state-mandated action. Nineteen of the 24 states have such a requirement.

These include California, Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Oregon, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, New Jersey, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Nevada, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, Virginia, Vermont and Washington.

In Maryland, further, districts have an option — either provide remedial assistance or hold the students back.

How well is it working? Has student achievement

increased? "With only Arizona's mandate effect for the graduation class of 1977, the answer has to be — don't know yet," said Pipho.

But the movement's gotten plenty of attention. The National Institute of Education has had two studies — one of New Jersey experience with minimal competency and the other a follow-up study of California's early exit program.

Both studies should be ready in the fall.

A&M given grant to study effect of lignite mines

Lignite mining is beginning to crank up as an industry in Texas, but the energy companies are striving to ensure that the grass continues to grow green while the state gets its needed infusion of fuel.

Texas A&M University has been awarded \$170,000 by the Southwestern Electric Power Co. of Shreveport to do just that at the site of a potential lignite mine in Harrison County, about 10 miles east of Longview.

A team of geologists, a soil scientist and a civil engineer, working through Texas A&M's Center for Applied Geosciences, will investigate possible environmental problems that could develop during the mining operations.

"In light of our declining oil and gas resources and the large deposits of Texas lignite, numerous utility companies are now looking to lignite as a fuel source for electric power generation," explained Dr. Christopher C. Mathewson, head of the project.

"Surface mining is the most efficient method to recover much of the extensive, low-grade deposits of lignite that are found in Texas. This method amounts to removing the over-lying soil and replacing it in the previously mined-out trench, followed by the mining of the exposed lignite," he said.

"This means there is a relatively small active mining area open at any one time and it allows contemporaneous reclamation of the land," Mathewson said.

"The Railroad Commission has been given the authority to regulate surface mining and the responsibility of protecting our environment," he said. "Since surface mining may have a significant impact on our environment, and since we have very little detailed knowledge of these impacts, this research will provide vital information about the environmentally safe use of this energy resource."

"For instance, the mining is affected by shallow groundwater conditions. Ancient stream channels and beaches have turned into local underground water sources," he said.

"If the mining operation should intercept one of the channels it could cause mine flooding and delay or it could interrupt the water supply for the area wells. Careful planning can avoid these problems," Mathewson said.

The team will also look at aquifer sandstones, make a survey of all water wells within a mile of the mine and determine any effects of the chemical makeup of local well water.

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