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## High school students offered multiple pathways to graduation

By Guest Columnist Rosemary G. Aultman,  
Chair, Mississippi State Board of Education

There are no exit exams required for graduation in Mississippi. Yet there seems to be confusion or simply mis-information that continues to persist around this topic. I'm hopeful this information will provide clarity around the issue of end-of-course assessments in high school.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) administers assessments in four subject areas upon completion of the courses. Subject areas are Algebra 1, Biology 1, English II and U.S. History. Tests for mathematics, science and English are required by state and federal law. The U.S. History test is established by policy of the Mississippi State Board of Education (Board).

In 2013, state law required students to pass the end-of-course assessments in order to earn a diploma. However,

that is no longer the case. In 2014, the Board adopted a policy that provides alternate routes to graduation. Therefore, a passing score on each assessment is not the sole requirement for graduation in Mississippi. However, more than eighty percent of high school students in the state meet graduation requirements by passing the end-of-course exams. The remaining twenty percent meet the requirements through an alternate pathway.

Because we realize that all students have academic strengths and weaknesses, providing multiple options for showing mastery has proven beneficial for the students. These options include scoring a seventeen or better on the ACT in core areas of the college entrance exam, scoring C or better on college courses taken while in high school, and certain scores on military entrance or career technical exams.

As a result of providing multiple pathways to earn a diploma, and contrary to some mis-information, graduation rates have risen. In fact, Mississippi's graduation rate has reached an all-time high of eighty-three percent, just one point shy of the national rate of eighty-four percent. Since the policy

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