



## HOW THE STATES GOT THEIR RATES, CLASS OF 2015

As the graduation rate continues to rise, it's worth continuing to examine the diplomas that make up that rate in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Achieve analyzed the 95 diploma options across the country and looked at which states expect students to take courses so that when they graduate, students are academically prepared for life after high school.

The analysis looked at how many diplomas<sup>1</sup> a state offered, whether a state offered a diploma that meets college- and career-ready (CCR) course expectations in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics course requirements, assessment requirements associated with earning a diploma, and if or how student outcomes were reported by diploma type.

The second year of this analysis reveals that while many states have multiple diploma options for students, and several states are adding additional endorsement options, many states still do not publicly report how many students earn which diploma. The lack of transparency means that in most states there continue to be more questions than answers about the true value of a high school diploma.

### For the Class of 2015

- **Three states** graduated students against mandatory CCR graduation requirements for the first time — Minnesota, Nebraska, and West Virginia. The graduation rate in these states remained stable, or increased, even as the rigor of graduation requirements increased.
- In **nine states** and the **District of Columbia**, the percentage of students completing a CCR course of study increased from the class of 2014.
- Of the **12 states** and the **District of Columbia** that provided the number of students completing a CCR course of study in 2014 and 2015, **nearly 16,000 more students** completed this course of study in 2015 when compared to 2014.

### Achieve's Definition of College and Career Readiness

Readiness for college and careers depends in part on mastery of rigorous knowledge and skills in core academic disciplines including ELA/literacy, mathematics, history, civics, sciences, art, and music. Content knowledge and skills in mathematics and ELA/literacy are foundational to the study of all other disciplines and high school graduates are often asked to demonstrate competency in these subjects before they can begin further study (at two- and four-year colleges), enter certain job training/apprenticeship programs, or pursue the military career of their choice. To be prepared for any of these postsecondary opportunities, students need to take at least three years of mathematics (through the content generally found in an Algebra II or an integrated third year math course) and four years of rigorous, grade-level English.

<sup>1</sup>States define diplomas and graduation requirements differently, including offering only one diploma, multiple diplomas, or multiple courses of study (course requirements) leading to one diploma. For the purposes of this analysis, we use diploma as an umbrella term, recognizing that some states would not identify their graduation offerings as discrete diploma options, but rather, courses of study or course sequences leading to a diploma. Additionally, this analysis does not include any performance acknowledgments, endorsements, or Move on When Ready options that a state may offer nor any certificates of achievement or other offerings for students with disabilities. It is also important to note that districts can set more rigorous graduation requirements than the state; however, few states track district graduation requirements.

## Key Findings

- In **16 states**, the state does not offer a diploma that requires students to complete CCR requirements in ELA and mathematics (*Minimum diploma*). (Three fewer states than in 2014.)
- In **27 states**, students have multiple diploma options, but in all of these states, at least one option falls short of CCR expectations in ELA and mathematics (*CCR default with minimum or personal modification opt out, or CCR opt in*).
- In **seven states** and **the District of Columbia**, the state sets the expectation that all students will earn a diploma that includes CCR requirements in ELA and mathematics (*CCR mandatory*). In these states, the graduation rate is the same as the percentage of students who graduate having earned the CCR diploma option.
- Only **12 states** who offer multiple diplomas currently publicly report the percentage of students earning the CCR-level diploma.

## What Do These Findings Suggest?

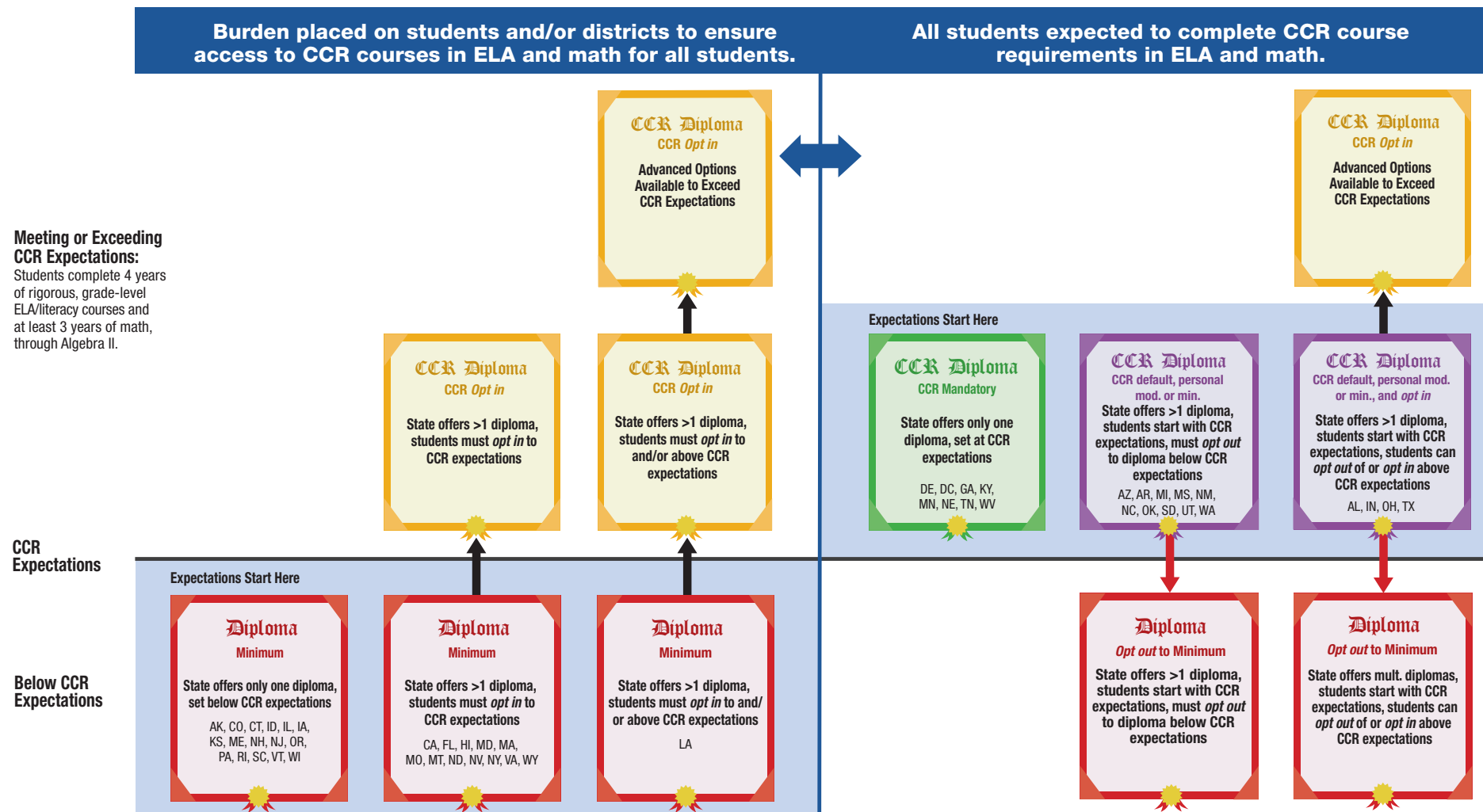
- In the last year, states have taken little action to report more transparent results about which students complete which courses and who earns which diploma.
  - *For students and parents*, this lack of transparency can lead to misunderstanding and misinformation about the difference between diploma options — what requirements are needed to graduate versus what requirements are needed for postsecondary training or college.
- *For policymakers*, this continued lack of transparency and public reporting of which students earned which diploma options in a state results in a graduation rate that masks which students earned which diploma and a knowledge gap regarding how students fare after high school based upon diploma earned.
- States should have graduation requirements that reflect their college- and career-ready standards.
  - All states have CCR standards in mathematics and ELA but not all states require that ALL students take courses aligned to those standards before graduation — until they do, too many students will face remediation in college or lack the skills and knowledge to start a career.
- States should continue to increase transparency.
  - Communicate clearly to students and parents about various diploma options, their course requirements, and how these options align with postsecondary opportunities.
  - Publish accessible and clear information about the percentage of students completing each diploma, and disaggregate this data by student subgroup.

Last year's edition of *How the States Got Their Rates* is available online at <http://www.achieve.org/how-the-states-got-their-rates>.

For additional details on states' graduation requirements (including unit and subject requirements), please visit <http://www.achieve.org/graduation-requirements>.

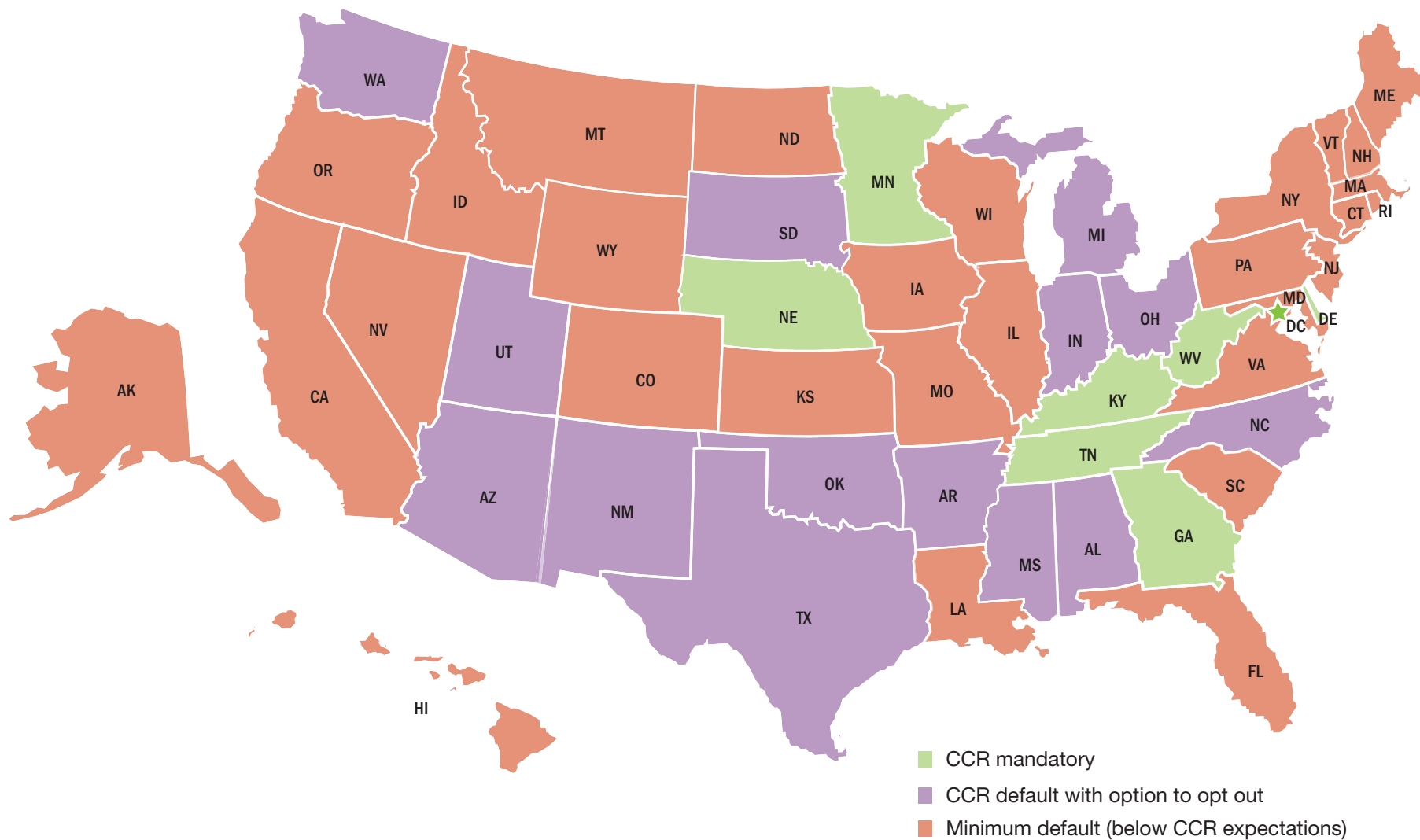
# STATES' APPROACHES TO DIPLOMA OFFERINGS AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE (2015 GRADUATES)

Currently, states take several approaches to diploma offerings. In some states, the expectations are set that all students can and should complete a CCR course of study in ELA/literacy and mathematics\* while in other states, the state sets lower expectations, putting the burden on students and districts to know what, and advocate for, courses students need to complete in order to be prepared for college. To see your state's current graduation requirements, click [here](#).



\*Readiness for college depends on more than the mastery of ELA/literacy and mathematics content and skills, but these two content areas serve as a foundation for the study of other academic disciplines, a well-rounded education, and contextualized learning. Please see Achieve's full definition of college and career readiness on page 1 of this report.

## EXPECTATIONS START HERE: DEFAULT DIPLOMA OFFERINGS BY STATE (2015 GRADUATES)





Column	Definitions and Methodology
2015 Graduation Rate	<p><b>Percentage:</b> State four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for 2014–15 as reported by states. Links to the state data are provided in the table. All states except for Ohio and Oklahoma have released 2014–15 ACGR; since no state-provided data was available for these two states, we used the U.S. Department of Education’s (USED) 2014–15 ACGR data.</p>
Diploma options for 2015 graduates	<p>The diplomas listed were reported by states to Achieve through annual surveys. Diplomas also refer to courses of study, course sequences and/or pathways available to students. This chart does not include any performance acknowledgements or endorsements that a state may offer nor any certificates of achievement or other offerings for students with disabilities. Some states have made changes to their graduation requirements since the class of 2015, including raising requirements to the college- and career-ready level. To view the most current graduation requirements in each state, click <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>All diplomas included in this table are used to calculate the ACGR as defined by the USED. Details are available <a href="#">here</a>. The table does not include graduation options available only to students with disabilities.</p> <p>States with an asterisk (*) listed after the diploma required students to achieve a passing score on an assessment to graduate, and/or factor student scores on end-of-course (EOC) assessment(s) into course grades. <i>Note: Most states transitioned to new assessments in 2014-15 and have changed student stakes. To view the most current student stakes for assessment, click <a href="#">here</a>. Too, all states that require students to achieve a passing score on an assessment offer alternate routes to meeting the requirement.</i></p> <p>★ Stars indicate that state first offered a CCR option for the class of 2015.</p>
Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	<p>Achieve considers states’ mathematics and ELA/literacy high school graduation requirements to be at the CCR level if students are expected to complete a course of study aligned with state-adopted CCR standards, which typically includes at least three years of mathematics (through the content generally found in an Algebra II or an integrated third-year math course) and four years of rigorous, grade-level English. Achieve has classified states’ CCR diploma offerings into the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CCR mandatory</b> (■): state has established graduation requirements that specify a CCR course of study that all students must complete. Students earn a high school diploma only if they complete the required courses or content.</li> <li>• <b>CCR default</b> (■): state requires all students to be automatically enrolled into a “default” CCR diploma, which students can opt out of if their parents sign a waiver. There are generally two approaches to establishing a default diploma: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum (M): States offer a separate minimum diploma for students who opt out of the default CCR course of study.</li> <li>• Personal Modification (P): States allow students to opt out of individual courses – typically advanced mathematics or science courses – but award students the same diploma as those who complete the full set of CCR requirements.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>CCR voluntary</b> (■) diploma: state has a college-preparatory curriculum or course sequence aligned with postsecondary admissions requirements that are at the CCR level, but students must individually choose to opt into them.</li> </ul> <p>A state’s diploma offering(s) are considered <b>Minimum</b> (■) if the diploma requirements do not meet CCR expectations as defined above.</p>
Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015	<p><b>Percentage:</b> If available, the percentage of students earning CCR diplomas in the state in 2015.</p> <p><b>NR (Not Reported):</b> If the diploma was CCR but the state did not report the percentage of students earning that diploma. Additionally, states that have CCR default diplomas with personal modification opt out are classified as a “Not Reported” because none publicly report the percentage of students personally modifying the requirements.</p> <p><b>N/A (Not Applicable):</b> If the diploma was not at the CCR level the state received an N/A.</p> <p>↑↓↔ Directional arrows in a cell indicate whether the rate increased, decreased, or remained stable since 2014.</p> <p><i>Note: Generally the percentage reported in this column is of the graduates, not of the cohort that started four years prior. The denominators are provided in the chart to clarify whether states are reporting against graduates or the cohort.</i></p>
Student subgroup data reported	<p><b>YES:</b> State reports data against all or most of the federal indicators.</p> <p><b>NO:</b> State does not report subgroup data. States with CCR default diplomas with personal modification opt out are classified as a “NO” because they do not publicly report the percentage of students personally modifying the requirements.</p>

# STATES' 2015 DIPLOMAS, GRADUATION RATES, ASSOCIATED REQUIREMENTS, AND PUBLIC REPORTING

Please refer to the definitions page that precedes this table for additional clarification about the information presented in this table and data sources.

State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Alabama	<a href="#">89.3%</a>	Alabama High School Diploma with Advanced Academic Endorsement (First Choice)	CCR default (M)	Not reported	NO
		Alabama High School Diploma with Advanced Career/Technical Endorsement	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Alabama High School Diploma (AHSD)	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Alabama High School Diploma with Career/Technical Endorsement	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Alabama High School Diploma with Credit-Based Endorsement	Minimum	N/A	NO
Alaska	<a href="#">75.6%</a>	Alaska High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Arizona	<a href="#">77.6%</a>	Arizona High School Diploma	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Arkansas	<a href="#">84.9%</a>	Arkansas High School Diploma	CCR default (M)	Not reported	NO
		Arkansas Core Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
California	<a href="#">82.3%</a>	California Readiness Curriculum A-G (From Postsecondary side)	CCR opt in	<a href="#">43.4% of 2015 graduates</a> ↑	YES
		California High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES

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State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Colorado	<a href="#">77.3%</a>	Colorado High School Diploma (local control)	Minimum	N/A	YES
Connecticut	<a href="#">87.2%</a>	Connecticut High School Diploma <sup>2</sup>	Minimum	N/A	YES
Delaware	<a href="#">84.3%</a>	Delaware High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	84.3% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12 ↔	YES
District of Columbia	<a href="#">65.4%</a>	District of Columbia High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	65.4% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12 ↑	YES
Florida	<a href="#">77.9%</a>	Florida College Prep Curriculum	CCR opt in	Not yet available <sup>3</sup>	NO
		Florida 3-Year College Preparatory Program*	CCR opt in	See note	NO
		Florida 3-Year Career Preparatory Program*	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Florida Standard High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO
Georgia	<a href="#">79.0%</a>	Georgia High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	78.8% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12 ↑	YES
Hawaii	<a href="#">82.0%</a>	Hawaii Board of Education Recognition Diploma*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">14.0% of completers</a> ↔	NO
		Hawaii High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Idaho	<a href="#">78.9%</a>	Idaho High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES

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<sup>2</sup> In Connecticut, participation in and satisfactory completion of high school mastery tests is required for graduation. Local policy determines passing cut scores for these assessments.

<sup>3</sup> Historically, Florida reports the percentage of graduates completing the College Prep Curriculum. This percentage has not yet been released for 2015. The percentage of graduates completing the College Prep Curriculum in 2014 was 63.6%. [Source](#).



Table continued

State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Illinois	<u>86.0%</u>	Illinois High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Indiana	<u>88.7%</u>	Indiana Core 40 Diploma*	CCR default (M)	<u>50.4% of graduates</u> ↔	YES
		Indiana Core 40 Diploma with Academic Honors*	CCR opt in	<u>36.1% of graduates</u> ↑	YES
		Indiana Core 40 Diploma with Technical Honors*	CCR opt in		YES
		Indiana General Diploma (Opt-out diploma)*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Iowa	<u>90.8%</u>	Iowa High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Kansas	<u>86.1%</u>	Kansas High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Kentucky	<u>88.0%</u>	Kentucky High School Diploma*	CCR mandatory	88.0% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12 ↑	YES
Louisiana	<u>77.5%</u>	Louisiana High School Diploma (Core 4 Curriculum)*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Louisiana High School Diploma with Academic Endorsement*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Louisiana High School Diploma with Career/Technical Endorsement*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Louisiana Career Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Louisiana Basic Core Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO

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State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Maine	<a href="#">87.5%</a>	Maine High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Maryland	<a href="#">87.0%</a>	University System of Maryland Course Requirements*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">59.0% of 2015 graduates</a> ↓	YES
		Maryland High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Massachusetts	<a href="#">87.3%</a>	MassCore*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">72.3% of 2015 graduates</a> ↔	YES
		Local Control*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Michigan	<a href="#">79.8%</a>	Michigan Merit Curriculum	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Minnesota ★	<a href="#">81.9%</a>	Minnesota High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	81.9% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12	YES
Mississippi	<a href="#">78.4%</a>	Mississippi High School Diploma*	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
		Mississippi Career Pathway Option*	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Mississippi District Option Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Mississippi Early Exit Diploma Option*	Minimum	N/A	NO
Missouri	<a href="#">88.0%</a>	Missouri CBHE High School Core Curriculum Requirement	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Missouri High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES

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State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Montana	<a href="#">86.0%</a>	Minimum Core College Preparatory Program	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Rigorous Core College Preparatory Program	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Montana High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Nebraska ★	<a href="#">88.9%</a>	Local Control	CCR mandatory	88.9% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12	YES
Nevada	<a href="#">70.8%</a>	Nevada Advanced Diploma*	CCR opt in <sup>4</sup>	<a href="#">30.7% of completers</a> ↑	NO
		Nevada High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO
New Hampshire	<a href="#">88.1%</a>	New Hampshire High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
New Jersey	<a href="#">89.7%</a>	New Jersey High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
New Mexico	<a href="#">68.6%</a>	New Mexico Diploma of Excellence*	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
New York	<a href="#">78.0%</a>	New York Advanced Designation Regents Diploma*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">32% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12</a> ↑	YES
		New York Regents Diploma*	Minimum <sup>5</sup>	N/A	YES
		New York State Local Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
North Carolina	<a href="#">85.6%</a>	North Carolina High School Diploma (Future-Ready Core)*	CCR default (P)	Not reported <sup>6</sup>	NO

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<sup>4</sup> While the Advanced Studies Diploma does not meet Achieve’s criteria for CCR ELA/literacy and mathematics graduation requirements, a student may submit this diploma as qualification for admission to public institutions within the Nevada System of Higher Education.

<sup>5</sup> New York offers additional variations on these diplomas, see [spreadsheet](#) for additional details.

<sup>6</sup> Graduates in the class of 2015 were able to earn endorsements in addition to the North Carolina High School Diploma. While data were not available for what percentage of graduates earned these endorsements in 2015, the state did provide data for the class of 2016. For the Career, College, and College/UNC endorsements, 59 percent of graduates earned at least one endorsement, and 14 percent of graduates earned all three endorsements. Additional data are available [here](#).





Table continued

State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Pennsylvania	<a href="#">84.8%</a>	Pennsylvania High School Diploma (local control)	Minimum	N/A	YES
Rhode Island	<a href="#">83.2%</a>	Rhode Island High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
South Carolina	<a href="#">80.3%</a>	South Carolina High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
South Dakota	<a href="#">83.9%</a>	South Dakota High School Diploma	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Tennessee <sup>9</sup>	<a href="#">87.8%</a>	Tennessee High School Diploma*	CCR mandatory	87.8% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011-12 ↑	YES
Texas	<a href="#">89.0%</a>	Texas Distinguished Achievement Program*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">15.0% of graduates</a> ↓	YES
		Texas Recommended High School Program*	CCR default (M)	<a href="#">71.1% of graduates</a> ↑	YES
		Texas Minimum High School Program*	Minimum <sup>10</sup>	N/A	YES
		Texas Foundation High School Program*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Utah	<a href="#">84.0%</a>	Utah Standard Diploma	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Vermont	<a href="#">87.6%</a>	Vermont High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES

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<sup>9</sup> In Tennessee, S 285/HB 36 of 2015 removed the requirement that grading policies of local boards of education must include student scores in a TCAP subject area as part of the student's grade in that subject area; permits a local school board to have such policy if it so desires.

<sup>10</sup> In 2013, the Texas Legislature passed HB 5, which replaces the CCR-level Recommended High School Program with the Foundation High School Program as the default course of study, which is not at the CCR level. The Distinguished Achievement Program, which sets the bar even higher than the CCR level, is being replaced with the Distinguished Level of Achievement. Students completing their fourth or final year of high school in 2014-15 had the option of graduation under the Foundation High School Program. Of the 287,947 class of 2015 graduates, 8,191 (2.8%) graduated under the Foundation High School Program without endorsement. [Source](#).



Table continued

State	2015 Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2015 graduates (* denotes assessment(s) factors into course grades OR students must pass to graduate)	Diploma classification: either minimum (not CCR) or CCR mandatory, default (M) or (P), or opt in.	Percentage of students earning a CCR diploma in 2015 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate.)	Student subgroup data reported
Virginia	<u>87.9%</u>	Virginia Advanced Studies Program*	CCR opt in	<u>51.6% of the 9th grade cohort in 2011–12</u> ↑	YES
		Virginia Standard High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Washington	<u>78.1%</u>	Washington High School Diploma*	CCR default (P)	N/A	NO
West Virginia★	<u>86.5%</u>	West Virginia High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	86.5% of the 2011–12 9th grade cohort	YES
Wisconsin	<u>88.4%</u>	Wisconsin High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Wisconsin Technical High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
Wyoming	<u>79.4%</u>	Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship Honors Level*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship Performance Level*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship Opportunity Level*	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Wyoming High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
		Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship Provisional Opportunity Level*	Minimum	N/A	NO

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