



## HOW THE STATES GOT THEIR RATES

Even as graduation rates rise, policymakers and families wonder: *Does a high school diploma mean that students are ready for what comes next?* Graduates wonder: *Did I take the right classes and have the experiences I need to pursue the future I envision for myself?* State leaders should be reflecting too: *Do our state policies set the right expectations so that all students graduate college and career ready? Do we tell parents and students what they need to know so that families can make choices about their children's futures?*

To try to understand these questions, Achieve analyzed the 93 diploma options available across all 50 states and the District of Columbia for the class of 2014.

The analysis looked at how many diplomas<sup>1</sup> a state offered, whether a state offered a diploma that met college- and career-ready (CCR) 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 analysis reveals that while many states have multiple diploma options for students, many of these states do not publicly report how many students earn which diploma. The lack of transparency means that in

most states there are more questions than answers about the true value of a high school diploma, including:

- *How many and which students complete which diplomas and how are those students faring in life beyond high school?*
- *How different are the course requirements between diploma options in the state?*
- *Are students from different subgroups (income, race, gender, etc.) being held to different expectations?*
- *Can a student complete the state's minimum graduation requirements, complete the state's assessment requirements and/or GPA requirements, receive a diploma, and still not be ready for a two-year or technical school, an apprenticeship, the military, or a four-year institution?*
- *Do students and families fully understand the implications of selecting courses and, in some states, certain diplomas and what those choices mean for their options after high school?*

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

Readiness for college and careers 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 and contextualized learning. To be prepared for 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 acknowledgements or endorsements 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: Analysis of Class of 2014 Diplomas

When students walk across the graduation stage and are handed a high school diploma, they (and their parents) believe they've earned a passport to further learning. Yet in too many states, for too many students, the diploma is not an indication of college and career readiness — a fact that students may not know until they try to pursue their next steps.

- In **20 states**, the state does not offer a diploma that requires students to complete CCR requirements in ELA and mathematics (*Minimum diploma*).
- In **26 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 **4 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 **9 states** who offer multiple diplomas currently publicly report the percentage of students earning the CCR-level diploma.

### What do these findings suggest?

- *For students, and their parents*, this variety of diploma offerings can lead to misunderstanding and misinformation about the difference between diploma options and how different diplomas support different postsecondary plans.

- *For policymakers*, a state's reported graduation rate may mask which students earned which diploma options in the state. Without transparency and public reporting of the percentage of graduates earning each diploma option, the state cannot obtain useful information about who earns which diploma option and how those students fare after high school — information that is critical for parents, students, teachers, and counselors.

### 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 be underprepared for postsecondary success.

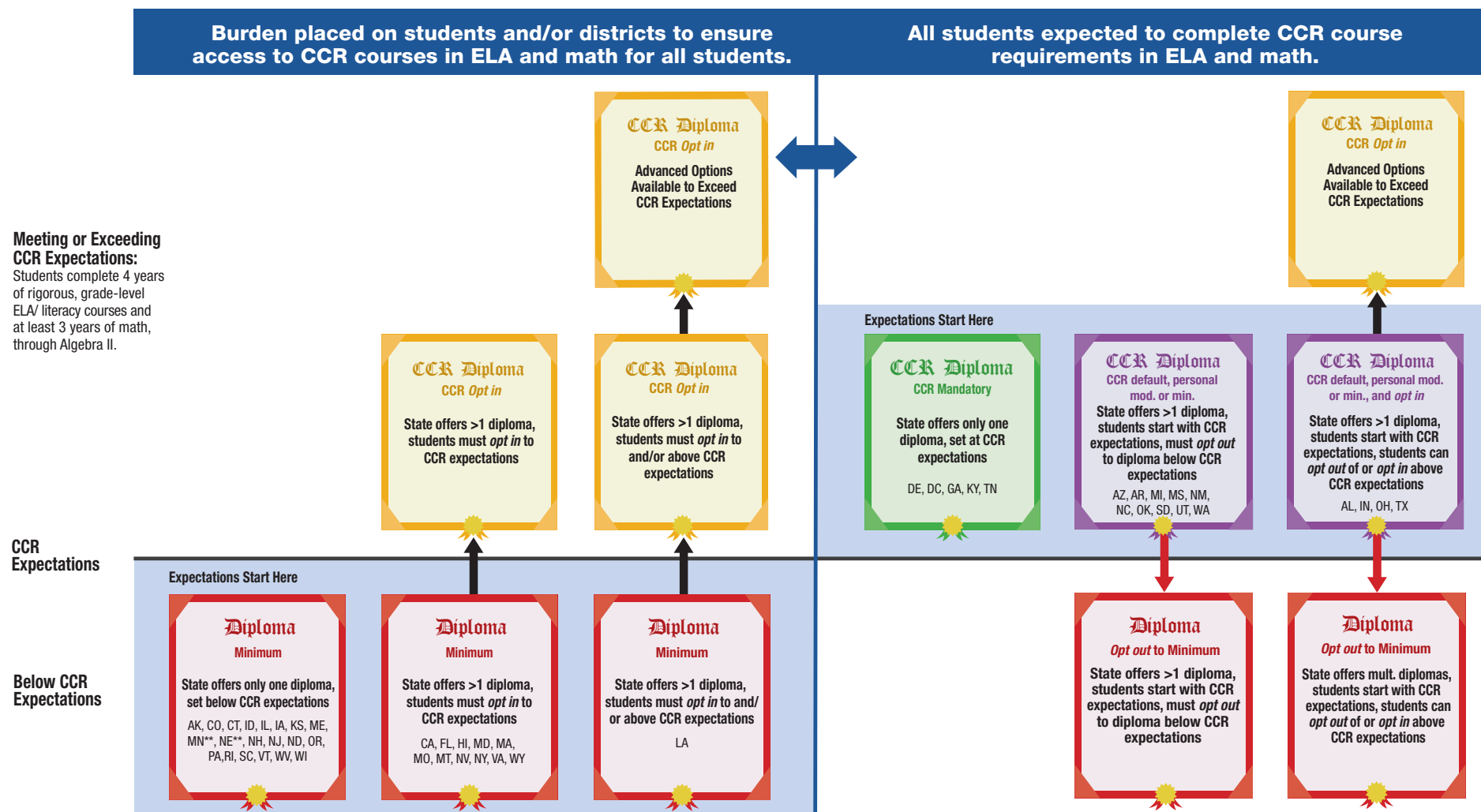
### States should be more transparent.

States can take steps to improve the value of the high school diploma — starting with increasing transparency around diplomas and course sequences so that students, families, educators, and policymakers can make better-informed decisions. States should:

- 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.

# STATES' APPROACHES TO DIPLOMA OFFERINGS AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE (2014 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.

\*\*Minnesota and Nebraska raised their states' graduation requirements to the CCR level for all students beginning with the graduating class of 2015.



Column	Definitions and Methodology
Graduation Rate	<b>Percentage:</b> State four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for 2013-14 as reported by states. Links to the state data are provided in the table. Some states have yet to release 2013-14 ACGR and the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has not released state data either.
Diploma options for 2014 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 2014, 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>
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 2014	<p><b>Percentage:</b> If available, the percentage of students earning CCR diplomas in the state in 2014.</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><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' 2014 DIPLOMAS, GRADUATION RATES, ASSOCIATED REQUIREMENTS, AND PUBLIC REPORTING

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

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Alabama	<u>86%</u>	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	<u>71.1%</u>	Alaska High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Arizona	<u>75.76%</u>	Arizona High School Diploma*	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
		Grand Canyon Diploma	Minimum	Not reported	NO
Arkansas	<u>86.9%</u>	Arkansas High School Diploma	CCR default (M)	Not reported	NO
		Arkansas Core Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO

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State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
California	<u>81.0%</u>	California Readiness Curriculum A-G*	CCR opt in	<u>41.9% of 2014 graduates</u>	YES
		California High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Colorado	<u>77.3%</u>	Colorado High School Diploma (local control)	Minimum	N/A	YES
Connecticut	<u>87%</u>	Connecticut High School Diploma <sup>1</sup>	Minimum	N/A	YES
Delaware	<u>84.4%</u>	Delaware High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	84.4% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11	YES
District of Columbia	<u>61.40%</u>	District of Columbia High School Diploma	CCR mandatory	61.4% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11	YES
Florida	<u>76.1%</u>	Florida College Prep Curriculum*	CCR opt in	Not yet available <sup>2</sup>	NO
		Florida 3-Year College Preparatory Program*	CCR opt in	See note <sup>3</sup>	NO
		Florida 3-Year Career Preparatory Program*	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Florida High School Diploma: Standard Program*	Minimum	N/A	NO
Georgia	<u>72.6%</u>	Georgia High School Diploma*	CCR mandatory	72.6% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11	YES

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<sup>1</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>2</sup> Historically, Florida reports the percentage of graduates completing the College Prep Curriculum. This percentage has not yet been released for 2014. The percentage of graduates completing the College Prep Curriculum in 2013 was 63.0%. [Source](#).

<sup>3</sup> Florida reports the number of students in a cohort who earned this option. In 2013-14, 59 diplomas were awarded. [Source](#).



Table continued

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Hawaii	Not yet available	Hawaii Board of Education Recognition Diploma*	CCR opt in	<u>14.0% of completers</u>	NO
		Hawaii High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Idaho	<u>77.3%</u>	Idaho High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Illinois	<u>86%</u>	Illinois High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Indiana	<u>89.8%</u>	Indiana Core 40 Diploma*	CCR default (M)	<u>50.5% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</u>	YES
		Indiana Core 40 Diploma with Academic Honors*	CCR opt in	<u>34.8% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</u>	YES
		Indiana Core 40 Diploma with Technical Honors*	CCR opt in		
		Indiana General Diploma (Opt-out diploma)*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Iowa	<u>90.54%</u>	Iowa High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Kansas	<u>83.8%</u>	Kansas High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Kentucky	<u>87.5%</u>	Kentucky High School Diploma*	CCR mandatory	<u>87.5% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</u>	YES

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State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Louisiana	<a href="#">74.6%</a>	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
Maine	<a href="#">86.5%</a>	Maine High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Maryland	<a href="#">86.4%</a>	University System of Maryland Course Requirements*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">60% of 2014 graduates</a>	YES
		Maryland High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Massachusetts	<a href="#">86.1%</a>	MassCore*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">72.4% of 2014 graduates</a>	YES
		Local Control*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Michigan	<a href="#">78.58%</a>	Michigan Merit Curriculum	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Minnesota	<a href="#">81.2%</a>	Minnesota High School Diploma*	Minimum <sup>1</sup>	N/A	YES

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<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Minnesota passed a policy to raise its graduation requirements to the CCR level for all students beginning with the graduating class of 2015.





Table continued

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Mississippi	Not yet available	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	87.4%	Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) Recommended High School Core Curriculum	CCR opt in	Not reported	NO
		Missouri High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Montana	85.4%	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	89.68%	Local Control	Minimum <sup>1</sup>	N/A	YES
Nevada	70.0%	Nevada Advanced Diploma*	CCR opt in	Not yet available <sup>2</sup>	NO
		Nevada High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO
New Hampshire	88.65%	New Hampshire High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010, Nebraska passed a policy to raise its graduation requirements to the CCR level for all students beginning with the graduating class of 2015.

<sup>2</sup> While the Advanced 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. Historically, Nevada reports the percentage of completers earning the Advanced Diploma. This percentage has not yet been released for 2014. The percentage of completers earning the Advanced Diploma in 2013 was 27.2%. [Source](#).

Table continued

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
New Jersey	<a href="#">88.60%</a>	New Jersey High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
New Mexico	<a href="#">69.3%</a>	New Mexico Diploma of Excellence*	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
New York	<a href="#">76.40%</a>	New York Diploma with Advanced Designation*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">31% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</a>	YES
		New York Regents Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
		New York State Local Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
North Carolina	<a href="#">83.9%</a>	North Carolina High School Diploma (Future-Ready Core)	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
North Dakota	<a href="#">86.93%</a>	North Dakota High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Ohio	Not yet available	Ohio High School Diploma*	CCR default (M)	Not reported	NO
		Ohio Academic Diploma with Honors*	CCR opt in	Not yet available <sup>3</sup>	NO
		Ohio Career-Technical Diploma with Honors*	CCR opt in		
		Ohio International Baccalaureate Diploma with Honors*	CCR opt in		
Oklahoma	Not yet available	Oklahoma College-Prep/Work-Ready Curriculum*	CCR default (M)	<a href="#">83.7% of 2014 graduates</a>	NO
		Oklahoma Core Curriculum Standards Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	NO

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<sup>3</sup> Ohio does not publicly report at the state level the percentage of students completing the honors diploma options; however, Ohio made this data available to Achieve for the 2014 Closing the Expectations Gap report — 14.0% of 2013 graduates earned an honors diploma. Historically, the state does report at the school level the percentage of students earning the honors diploma options through the state's school report cards, available [here](#), but report cards reflecting 2014 graduates are not yet available.



Table continued

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Oregon	<a href="#">71.98%</a>	The Oregon Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
Pennsylvania	Not yet available	Pennsylvania High School Diploma (local control)	Minimum	N/A	YES
Rhode Island	<a href="#">81%</a>	Rhode Island High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
South Carolina	Not yet available	South Carolina High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES
South Dakota	<a href="#">82.74%</a>	South Dakota High School Diploma	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Tennessee	<a href="#">87.2%</a>	Tennessee High School Diploma*	CCR mandatory	87.2% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11	YES
Texas	<a href="#">88.3%</a>	Texas Distinguished Achievement Program*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">15.6% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</a>	YES
		Texas Recommended High School Program*	CCR default (M)	<a href="#">69.9% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</a>	YES
		Texas Minimum High School Program*	Minimum <sup>4</sup>	N/A	YES
Utah	<a href="#">83%</a>	Utah Standard Diploma	CCR default (P)	Not reported	NO
Vermont	<a href="#">87.8%</a>	Vermont High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	YES
Virginia	<a href="#">86.1%</a>	Virginia Advanced Studies Program*	CCR opt in	<a href="#">50.7% of the 9th grade cohort in 2010-11</a>	YES
		Virginia Standard High School Diploma*	Minimum	N/A	YES

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<sup>4</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 student, 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 2013-14 had the option of graduating under the Foundation High School Program. Of the 294,240 class of 2014 graduates, 3,312 (1.1%) graduated under the Foundation High School Program. [Source](#).

Table continued

State	Graduation Rate	Diploma options for 2014 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 2014 (Note: this column may have a different denominator than the graduation rate)	Student subgroup data reported
Washington	<u>77.2%</u>	Washington High School Diploma*	CCR default (P)	N/A	NO
West Virginia	<u>84.46%</u>	West Virginia Core Plus Skilled Pathway Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
		West Virginia Core Plus Professional Pathway Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
Wisconsin	<u>88.6%</u>	Wisconsin High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
		Wisconsin Technical High School Diploma	Minimum	N/A	NO
Wyoming	<u>78.61%</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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