
The Arizona Republic

'04 AIMS 'Attainable,' Experts Say

Test Made for Average Students

April 3, 2005

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Retrieved 04/22/05 from

<http://www.azcentral.com/families/education/articles/0403edaims03sidebar.html>

The 2004 high school AIMS test was not overloaded with tough, pre-college questions, and most struggling students could pass the exit exam if they received targeted tutoring, researchers from two state universities reported last week.

"It is an attainable test," Arizona State University's David Garcia said. The Arizona State Board of Education asked the state's universities for help after disappointing results on the spring 2004 AIMS test for the Class of 2006, the first that must pass the reading, writing and math test to graduate.

After another attempt in the fall, a little fewer than half of the state's 65,000 juniors passed all three sections of the test. Students retook the reading and writing sections for a third time in February and will retake math on April 12. Students have two more chances to take any test section before graduation day. Here is what the study found:

- Average high school students can pass the test. No questions are targeted only at higher-level students, and most who failed the test came very close to passing.
- It is a reliable general reading and math test, as reliable as other national standardized tests. It's not statistically reliable when it comes to determining if your child has mastered very specific skills, such as vocabulary or estimating numbers, because there are not enough questions.
- If you understand linear equations, you'll likely pass math. Students who failed the math section correctly answered most algebra questions, but got stuck on linear equations. Students who understood them passed math in high numbers.

- Two reading concepts stump students: Students who failed the reading section either didn't know literary vocabulary, such as personification and alliteration, or didn't recognize emotions expressed through written words, such as determining if a writer sounded angry or hopeful.
- Simply retaking the test won't help. Tutoring or classes targeting a student's specific weakness would help.

Later in April, Garcia and University of Arizona's Jerome D'Agostino will present a second report about smaller student categories, such as race and ethnicity, poverty, gender, and English learners. The State Board of Education has scheduled a high school AIMS study session April 21.

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