



The Benefits of Statewide Use of the ACT[®] Test

Recently, there has been increasing interest among state governments in establishing statewide testing of high school students. This interest has been driven by various goals, such as reforming high schools, improving the alignment between P–12 requirements and postsecondary expectations, and fulfilling the mandates of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In addition, attention and interest has focused on the importance of preparing all students for college and work, and on the rigor of state standards and of current high school graduation and/or school accountability tests.

These converging issues combine to make the concept of the incorporation of a statewide college readiness test into a state program a timely idea and one that can play an important role within an effective plan to address many of the important issues that state educators and policymakers are facing.

As part of their move toward statewide assessment at the high school level, a number of states have adopted the ACT[®] test. The ACT, for students in grades 11 and 12, measures students' academic readiness to make successful transitions to college and work after high school. The ACT is the most widely accepted and used test by postsecondary institutions across the U.S. for college admission and course placement.

For the past five years, Colorado and Illinois have paved the way in adopting the ACT as part of their statewide assessment programs. Colorado uses the ACT in the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) as an eleventh-grade achievement-based assessment that gives the state an indication of how well its public schools are performing at educating students at the K–12 level. Illinois also administers the ACT to all of its public high school juniors as part of its Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE). Illinois uses the ACT to measure student progress at meeting state learning standards.

Recently, the state of Michigan adopted the ACT as its statewide high school assessment program. The ACT will replace the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) for all Michigan high school students beginning in the 2007–2008 school year. More than a dozen other states are currently considering adopting the ACT as part of their statewide assessments at the eleventh- or twelfth-grade level. Here are just some of the reasons why.

The ACT directly responds to a number of state and national issues.

- *The ACT is an achievement-based test that assesses student mastery of both state learning standards and college readiness standards. Not only have the knowledge and skills tested on the ACT been shown to correlate strongly with state learning standards, they also reflect those additional skills that have been deemed crucial for first-year college success by postsecondary educators responding to the periodic ACT National Curriculum Survey[®]. Because of its merging of state K–12*

standards and postsecondary requirements, the ACT supplies a crucial “missing link” between the two school systems.

- *The ACT addresses high college remediation rates and costs.* As a measure of college readiness, the ACT can be used to intervene with students who are falling short of college readiness standards. Improving students’ readiness for college means that fewer students will need to take remedial coursework in college, thereby lowering the costs of remediation incurred by schools and states. ACT research suggests that, depending on the size of its college-bound population, states may potentially save millions of dollars.
- *The ACT can meet and has met federal standards.* States are using the ACT in fulfillment of federal Title I and No Child Left Behind requirements.
- *The ACT connects easily to early readiness, preparation, and intervention efforts.* When used in combination with ACT’s eighth- and tenth-grade assessments, EXPLORE® and PLAN®, the ACT is the culmination of an integrated, three-stage educational exploration and planning process. EXPLORE, PLAN, and the ACT are based on the same score scale and thereby provide an articulated, systematic approach for intervention, progress monitoring, and evaluation. Students who take EXPLORE and PLAN not only benefit directly from the ability of these tests to provide guidance on their choice of high school coursework, but are also more likely to perform well on the ACT.
- *ACT provides program evaluation information.* Since its inception, the ACT has been designed to provide information to high schools about the effectiveness of their curricula and their instructional programs. These data are provided annually (based on current student performance) as well as longitudinally (based on the performance of their high school graduates in college). These college-to-high-school feedback reports help high schools evaluate how well they are preparing their graduates for college-level work.
- *ACT test users receive additional assistance from ACT.* ACT offers workshops and other forms of consultation to user states. Instructional support resources are available from ACT for the ACT test and its companion programs, helping to tie results directly to classroom practice, curricula, and state standards. States that have taken advantage of these opportunities report benefiting from ACT’s wealth of professional expertise.
- *The ACT is affordable.* Statewide administration of the ACT is not cost prohibitive, and may in fact be more cost efficient and effective than established state tests.
- *The ACT is an equal-opportunity assessment.* The ACT emphasizes academic preparation and options for *all* students, whether they plan to go on to college after high school or enter directly into a workforce training program. In addition, the ACT is administered under conditions that meet the highest standards of professional measurement practice, thereby offering all students a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do.

The ACT is proven to work.

- *The ACT is related to real-world success.* ACT scores are calibrated in relation to the course grades students have earned at hundreds of postsecondary institutions nationwide. These calibrations were used to create ACT's College Readiness Benchmark scores, empirically based standards indicating a student's likely degree of success in college or, increasingly, the workplace, where the same college-level skills are now expected of students who go directly to work after high school.
- *The ACT is a student motivator.* Because students can use their statewide ACT results to apply to college, they are motivated to perform well on test day. States report that the days on which the ACT is administered have the highest attendance rates of the school year—an indication of the value students place on the ACT. Because of this value, the ACT is well received by parents, schools, and other stakeholders.
- *ACT results are portable.* ACT scores are accepted and endorsed by virtually every postsecondary institution in the United States.
- *ACT has a long history of service and credibility.* Now in its 47th year, the ACT has a reputation for professional and technical excellence that is recognized throughout the educational and measurement communities.

The ACT benefits students, parents, and schools.

- *Use of the ACT results in increased identification of talent and increased interest in planning for college.* Many students who might not otherwise have considered college as an option after high school have applied to, been accepted to, and attended college after earning encouraging scores on a statewide administration of the ACT.
- *Use of the ACT increases college attendance, especially for minority and low-income students.* Many of the students who considered college only after earning encouraging scores on the ACT are members of traditionally underrepresented groups or come from families whose income does not exceed \$30,000 per year.
- *When used with EXPLORE or PLAN, the ACT results in increased college readiness.* As discussed above, schools that use ACT's eighth- and tenth-grade exploratory and planning assessments are able to intervene early with students who are showing signs of being unready for college. Also, participation in EXPLORE or PLAN is likely to improve student performance on the ACT.
- *The ACT can be used for college course placement.* Students who take the ACT in high school have been able to submit their scores for course placement.

For additional details about the benefits of statewide administration of the ACT as well as profiles about ACT use in specific states and school districts, please see ACT's *EPAS Case Study* series. The series may be accessed online at <http://www.act.org/epas/case/index.html>. Further information about how the ACT increases college readiness can be found at <http://www.act.org/path/policy/education/collegereadiness.html>.

Is the ACT right for your state?

To answer this question, first identify the primary purposes and intended outcomes of your statewide assessment program. If your state is interested in increased college readiness (which also increases students' likelihood of graduating from college), earlier interventions to increase student achievement, increased college enrollment, and lower remediation costs, then consider statewide administration of the ACT. Statewide ACT administration also represents a strong solution for states interested in raising the rigor of their standards and assessments and for seamlessly connecting secondary and postsecondary education.

Next, weigh logistical questions: What is your timeline? What administration model is best for your state: mandatory or voluntary? How will students' scores be used? Are there legislative requirements that may affect how statewide testing is implemented in your state? How should use of the ACT interact with state testing programs already in existence in your state?

Consider other questions in evaluating whether statewide administration of the ACT is a practical solution for your state:

1. What is the match between your state's learning standards and the standards assessed by the ACT? (As of this writing, ACT has conducted matches between its College Readiness Standards and the standards in 37 states. To receive a copy of the match report for your state or to arrange for ACT to conduct a match with your state's standards, please contact your nearest ACT regional office.)
2. Is use of the ACT consistent with the intended outcomes of your statewide assessment program?
3. Is the ACT being used as one of multiple measures on which to base high-stakes decisions about the students in your state or about school or teacher effectiveness?
4. Does your implementation plan include informing students and parents about what the ACT measures, what the scores mean, and how the scores can help students prepare for what they want to do after high school?
5. Does your implementation plan also include informing teachers and administrators about what the ACT measures, how to interpret scores, and how ACT results relate to instruction?
6. Is the ACT administered under secure, standardized conditions that will provide all students with a fair and equitable opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and ensure the integrity of the test scores to those who interpret and use the results?
7. When ACT scores are combined with other statewide assessment measures, do ACT scores serve both as one of several measures of student achievement related to statewide goals and as an independent indicator of their readiness for college?

For more information about these and other issues, or for consultation, please contact the ACT regional office nearest you. Our professionals are available to help you analyze your needs, develop an administration plan that is right for you, and ensure that statewide administration of the ACT is implemented smoothly and efficiently.