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Ready to Go

Using the EXPLORE Test
to Increase 8th Grade
Readiness for Success

Stark Education Partnership
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SPECIAL THANKS

to the teachers, curriculum directors and district administration in Canton City, Plain and Marlinton Locals Schools who participated in this pilot and who are working daily to answer the question as to what we can best do.

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Executive Summary

During the 2009-10 academic year, 1,444 8th grade students in the Canton City, Plain and Marlinton Local School Districts (hereafter called Stark students) took the EXPLORE Test as part of a pilot project, *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness*, sponsored by the Stark Education Partnership with funding from the Ohio College Access Network. EXPLORE tests students on English, math, reading and science and measures progress towards college and career readiness through *College Readiness Standards*.

In addition to the test itself, questions in EXPLORE about career and post secondary plans were reviewed as well as data from pre and post surveys administered to parents, students, curriculum directors and teachers.

Findings from the EXPLORE Test

There were seven major findings from the EXPLORE Test:

Finding One: Stark County students in the aggregate are performing above

the national average on all sections of EXPLORE. However, there is a way to go here, as elsewhere, to fully meet ACT's *College Readiness Standards* on science, math, and reading.

Finding Two: Sub-group performance gaps on the basis of race are evident in EXPLORE.

Finding Three: Sub-group performance gaps on the basis of gender are evident with females outperforming males on all categories except mathematics. Both genders exceed *College Readiness Standards* on English with females also exceeding on reading.

Finding Four: The higher their EXPLORE score, the less indecision students show about post secondary education plans. Students with lower scores seem to select other post secondary options than college more often, such as training, apprenticeship or military.

Finding Five: Undecided, non-responsive and "other plans" answers aside, only a handful (less than 1%) of students see no need to finish high school or obtain further training. Sixty-nine percent of all students

indicated college plans. Students with higher performing scores are more likely to indicate a bachelor's or graduate degree as their final goal.

Finding Six: Even without further interventions to accelerate progress, districts should see increases in their college going rates.

Finding Seven: Even without further interventions to accelerate progress, all districts should see increases in their average ACT Composite scores based on the current performance of this cohort of students.

Findings from Pre and Post Surveys

Seven findings from the surveys supported the effectiveness of EXPLORE as a college readiness intervention.

Finding One: In general, curriculum directors saw positive changes in teacher familiarity about the purpose and use of the EXPLORE Test.

Finding Two: There was growth in the percentage of students who considered it "very likely" that they would eventually get a college degree.

Finding Three: Students felt that they gained in knowledge about what coursework was necessary to succeed in college or the workplace.

Finding Four: A large percentage of parents in all three districts believe that their students will go on to college. This percentage increased from the fall to the spring administrations of the survey.

Finding Five: Cost was the primary reason why some parents thought it was not possible for their student to go on to college.

Finding Six: The majority of middle school faculty believed before and after EXPLORE that grades 6-8 is the time to start thinking about college.

Finding Seven: Faculty gained knowledge about high school success skills and EXPLORE's College Readiness Standards.

The results of *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness* have demonstrated that the EXPLORE test can be a valuable middle school intervention to help prepare students for college and career readiness. SEP has requested that OCAN extend its grant and will find additional sources of funding to implement EXPLORE across all 17 Stark County school districts for the 2010-11 academic year.

I. The **EXPLORE** Test: What Did We Hope to Accomplish

Our research shows that, under current conditions, the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school. -ACT, Inc.¹

That ACT, Inc. believes the impact of what does not happen in middle school may be irreversible as students go on to college is alarming.

That alarm is heightened by ACT's research that only two in 10 eighth graders are actually "on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school."²

The lesson, according to a major policy report published by ACT in 2008, *The Forgotten Middle*, is simple. If we want students to be ready for college (and

career), we need to begin to intervene at the upper elementary and middle school level.

The need to intervene was the genesis of *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness for Success*, a project proposed and funded by the Stark Education Partnership (SEP) at \$21,000 with additional funding at \$20,000 from the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN).

¹ ACT, Inc. (2008) *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School*. Iowa City: Author, pp. 2-3.

² *The Forgotten Middle Executive Summary*.

The EXPLORE Test was the core of the *Ready to Go* project. Given in the 8th grade, EXPLORE is the first test in ACT's EPAS sequence of EXPLORE, PLAN (10th grade) and the ACT Test (11th, 12th grades). Aligned with *College Readiness Standards*, EXPLORE is an early predictor of whether students are on track to succeed in college or the workplace. Not part of the state assessment system, EXPLORE has been little used in Ohio.

Three Stark County school districts, Canton City Schools, an urban districts, Plain Local Schools, a suburban district and Marlinton Local Schools, a rural district, joined with the funders in this project.

SEP began *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness* with specific objectives:

- Eighth grade math, science and language arts teachers will understand and utilize

college/work readiness standards and benchmarks in designing 8th grade content.

- Students will evidence an understanding of the importance of their studies and their achievement on EXPLORE.
- Parents will demonstrate a greater understanding of the importance of middle school achievement for college or work.
- College access activities will further permeate the culture at the middle school as measured by pre and post experience surveys.
- Teachers will use EXPLORE data to address student deficits in meeting eighth grade *College Readiness Standards*.
- Teachers will actively examine course offerings to determine the degree to which those offerings are aligned with *College Readiness Standards*.

II. What We Did: A Timeline of Activities

The following chart outlines the planned and actual activities associated with *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness*.

Table 1. Ready to Go Timeline of Activities

Planned Activity	Actual Activity	Date
3 Districts notified – Canton City, Plain Local and Marlinton	Meetings held with superintendents, principals and curriculum directors to review grand activities and build understanding	June 2009
	Parent, student, teacher and cd surveys written by Gelb, Rochford, reviewed by districts, printed and distributed by Gelb to curriculum directors	August 2009
	Unanticipated cost of accommodation materials.	Fall 2009
Middle School Teacher Attitude Survey	Surveys administered within districts and returned to Gelb	Fall 2009
Curriculum Director Survey	Surveys administered within districts and returned to Gelb	Fall 2009

Planned Activity	Actual Activity	Date
Middle School Student & Parent Attitude Survey	Surveys administered within districts and returned to Gelb	Fall 2009
	Scanner and data analysis software purchased by SEP	Fall 2009
	All surveys scanned and tabulated by Gelb	Fall 2009
ACT, Inc. Professional Development for 3 Districts 8th grade teachers & CDs – Introducing EXPLORE – Standards & Benchmarks, Comparing with District standards, addressing deficits	CD's coordinate with ACT for professional development during late start or professional development days	September 4, 21, 22
EXPLORE Test Administration in 3 districts	Tests administered to 8th grade students.	By November, 2009
	Additional Plain PD	November 2009
ACT, Inc. reports test scores and school level results in 3 districts		By January 2010
ACT, Inc. Professional Development - 3 districts 8th grade teachers and CDs – Interpreting results & Local Data Analysis and implementing targeted instruction.	CDs and ACT, Inc.	January 2010
8th Grade Student/Parents Meetings	District, CDs	August - May
Targeted instruction in 3 districts	8th grade teachers, CDs	February - May
8th Grade Teacher, Student, Parent, CD Attitude Survey in 3 districts	Student, parent, teacher and CD spring surveys distributed by Gelb	March 2010
	Surveys returned to Gelb	April 2010
	Surveys scanned and tabulated by Gelb	May 2010
	Additional Plain PD	May 4
Comprehensive Evaluation Report Writing, Preparation and Publication	SEP – Rochford, Gelb, Ross	June 2010
Presentation of strategies and experiences by 3 Districts Teachers & CDs to Stark County CDs	Lioi presents results to 17 district superintendents	July 2010

III. What the *EXPLORE* Test Results Tell Us

A total of 1,444 eighth grade students in the Canton City, Plain and Marlinton Local School Districts (hereafter referred to as Stark students) took the EXPLORE Test under this grant.

In total, the results provide a broad view of the thinking and performance of 8th

graders for whom going to college will be a real decision in only a few short years.

This section will consist of a series of findings from the EXPLORE test. Results will be either in the aggregate, looking at results for all students combined or will look at scores for specific sub populations.

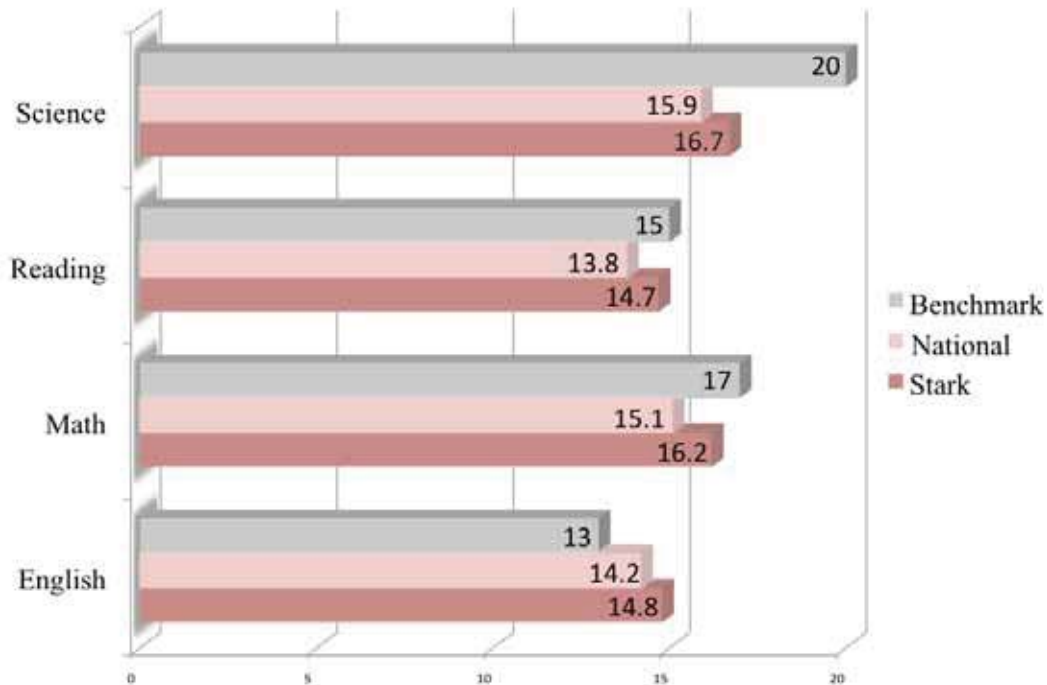
FINDING ONE: Stark County students in the aggregate are performing above the national average on all sections of EXPLORE and, as a result, on the Composite Score. However, there is a way to go here, as elsewhere, to fully meet ACT's *College Readiness Standards*³ in science, math, and reading.

While, the ACT test defines College Readiness Benchmarks as “the minimum score needed on a subject area test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a ‘B’ or higher or a 75% chance of obtaining a ‘C’ or higher in a corresponding credit bearing college course, EXPLORE’s, College

Readiness Standards predict at the 8th grade the probability that a student will be ready upon graduation from high school.

³This is the level of achievement that ACT calculates is necessary for students to have a high probability of success in first year credit-bearing college courses in the same area

Chart 1. Performance of Stark Students and the Nation on EXPLORE College Readiness Standards



– Source: ACT, Inc. EXPLORE Reports

Stark County has three major racial subdivisions reflected in the EXPLORE scores. These are non-Hispanic Caucasian, African American/Black and Multi-Racial. While the efforts of students in other racial subgroups should not be minimized, numbers are too low to give adequate comparisons for the purpose of any gap analysis.

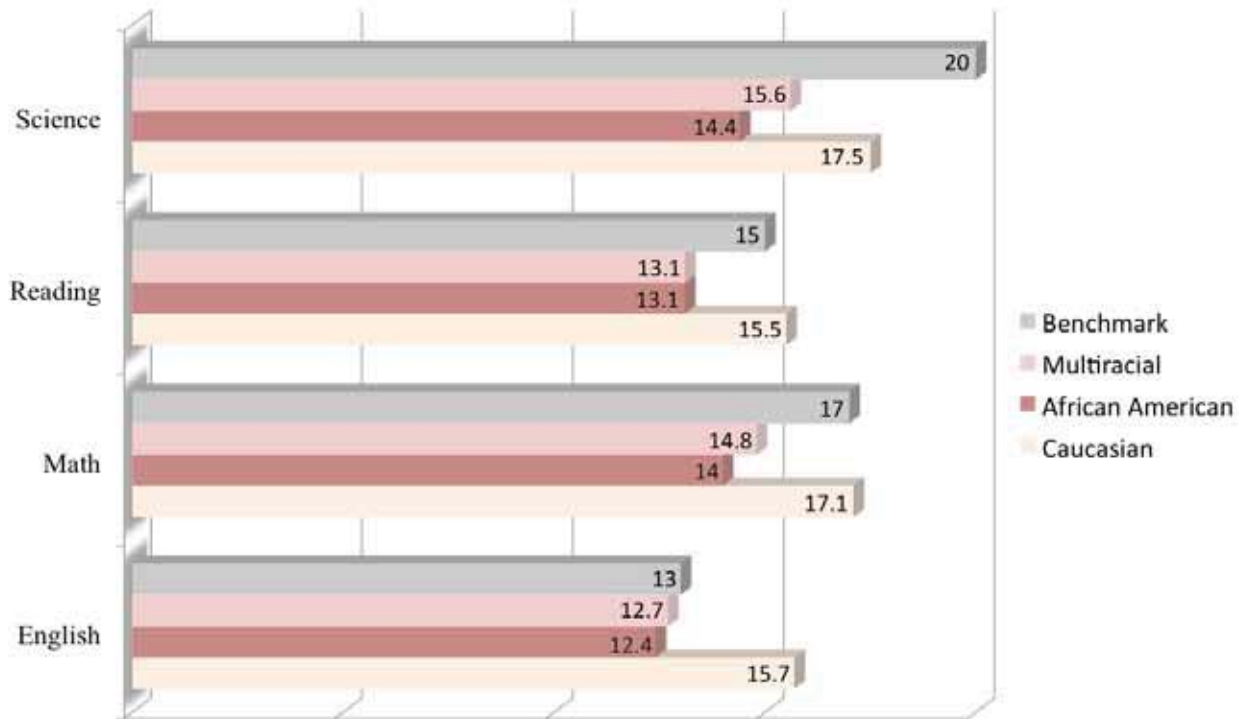
Table 2. Racial Composition of Stark EXPLORE Students by Number

Group	Number	Percent
African American/Black	257	17.8%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7	0.5%
Caucasian American/White	956	66.2%
Mexican American/Chicano	11	0.8%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	10	0.7%
Puerto Rican, Cuban, Hispanic	7	0.5%
Multiracial	124	8.6%
Other	24	1.7%
Prefer not to respond	41	2.8%
Total Group	1444	100%

– Source: ACT, Inc.

FINDING TWO: Sub-group performance gaps on the basis of race are evident in the EXPLORE Composite Score for Stark County’s major categories.

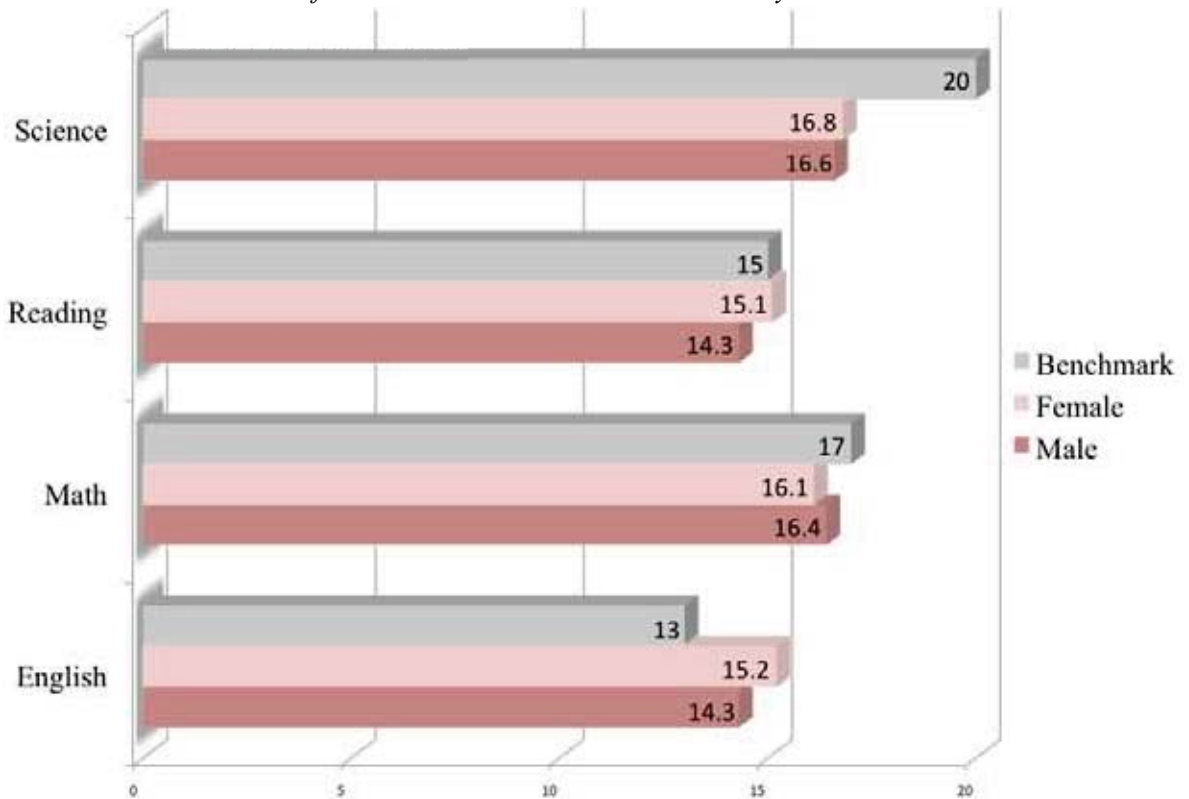
Chart 2. Stark Performance on EXPLORE Test Sections by Major Racial Category



– Source: ACT, Inc. EXPLORE Reports

FINDING THREE: Sub-group performance gaps on the basis of gender are evident with females outperforming males on all categories except mathematics. Both genders exceed *College Readiness Standards* on English with females also exceeding on reading.

Chart 3. Stark Student Performance on EXPLORE Test Sections by Gender



DISCUSSION: There are 692 males and 750 females identified in this sample.

FINDING FOUR: The higher their mean EXPLORE Composite Score, the less the indecision students show about post secondary education plans. Students with lower mean Composite Scores also seem to select other post secondary options than college more often, such as training, apprenticeship or the military.

Table 3. Students Career and Post Secondary Plans by Composite Score

Career preference category from Career Areas List	Number of students			Percent planning college core coursework*	Percent by educational plans					Mean Composite score
	Male	Female	Total		No HS/ No training	Appren./ Job train/ Military	Career/ Tech/ 2-yr coll.	4-yr coll. or more	Other/ Undecided	
Administration & Sales	99	29	128	52	4	7	7	65	17	15.2
Employment-Related Services	11	9	20	45	0	0	0	75	25	14.1
Marketing & Sales	24	6	30	53	0	3	7	73	17	15.2
Management & Planning	35	9	44	61	7	2	11	68	11	15.6
Regulation & Protection	29	5	34	44	6	21	6	47	21	15.1
Business Operations	13	12	25	56	8	0	12	76	4	15.2
Records & Communications	5	7	12	42	0	0	17	83	0	15.1
Financial Transactions	5	2	7	86	0	0	0	86	14	16.7
Distribution & Dispatching	3	3	6	50	33	0	17	50	0	13.5
Technical	168	37	206	41	4	13	12	47	24	15.1
Transport Operations & Related	15	4	19	58	0	16	11	42	32	14.5
Agriculture & Forestry & Related	12	11	23	39	4	0	9	70	17	15.3
Computer & Information Specialties	48	5	53	55	2	9	15	53	21	16.2
Construction & Maintenance	27	0	27	30	11	15	15	37	22	14.5
Crafts & Related Services	14	13	28	32	0	7	14	54	25	14.9
Manufacturing & Processing	7	2	9	33	0	56	11	22	11	15.6
Mechanical & Electrical Specialties	45	2	47	32	6	17	9	38	30	14.4
Science & Technology	169	244	414	54	0	3	5	80	11	16.6
Engineering & Technologies	85	11	97	57	2	7	7	65	19	16.9
Natural Science & Technologies	23	35	58	60	0	3	9	76	12	16.8
Medical Technologies	16	39	55	44	0	0	2	96	2	16.5
Medical Diagnosis & Treatment	40	144	184	55	0	2	4	85	9	16.4
Social Sciences	5	15	20	45	0	5	0	85	10	16.0
Arts	94	143	237	50	1	2	7	68	23	16.2
Applied Arts (Visual)	32	65	97	57	2	2	8	67	21	16.5
Creative & Performing Arts	50	71	121	42	0	2	7	65	26	15.9
Applied Arts (Written & Spoken)	12	7	19	63	0	0	0	84	16	16.3
Social Services	59	191	250	46	0	2	6	79	13	15.6
Health Care	20	63	83	49	0	0	4	86	11	15.5
Education	17	51	68	50	0	0	3	91	6	16.9
Community Services	20	44	64	39	0	2	0	91	8	14.9
Personal Services	2	33	35	43	0	14	29	17	40	14.6
No response given	76	68	144	8	1	1	1	13	85	14.9

*College core coursework: 4 or more years of English and 3 or more years each of mathematics, social studies, and natural science (see Glossary).

Source – ACT, Inc. EXPLORE Reports

DISCUSSION: It is interesting to note that the largest sub-group of students (414) also has the highest Composite Score average (16.6). These students displayed a preference for science and technology with the greatest number showing interest in the field of medicine.

FINDING FIVE: Undecided, non-responsive and “other plans” answers aside, only a handful (less than 1%) of students see no need to finish high school or obtain further training. Sixty-nine percent of all students indicated college plans. Students with higher performing scores are more likely to indicate a bachelor’s or graduate degree as their final goal.

Table 4. Student Post Secondary Plans and National Composite Score Quartiles

Educational plans category	Number of students responding	Percent of all students	Percent planning college core coursework*	Mean Composite score	Percent in national Composite score quartiles			
					1-24%	25-49%	50-74%	75-100%
Do not plan to finish high school	3	0	0	11.0	67	0	33	0
No training planned after high school	18	1	39	13.7	28	22	39	11
Job training in the military services	46	3	43	14.3	28	9	41	22
Apprentice / job training	18	1	44	14.0	44	11	11	33
Career / technical school	38	3	37	13.6	34	18	32	16
2-year / junior college	56	4	45	15.4	11	14	43	32
4-year college / university	426	30	53	16.2	14	8	33	45
Graduate or professional study	505	35	49	16.4	13	9	33	45
Undecided	150	10	54	15.3	16	13	39	32
Other plans	64	4	23	14.3	27	14	39	20
No response	119	8	2	15.2	28	8	27	37

-Source: ACT EXPLORE Reports

DISCUSSION: While students who are scoring well on the EXPLORE tend to have college in their plans, a good many higher performing students are either undecided or did not respond about future education plans. In the undecided category (over 10% of all students) nearly a third had EXPLORE scores that placed them in the top quartile in the nation; for the “no response” students (nearly another 10%), it was over a third.

It is difficult to determine what accounted for this high percentage of undecided/no response students, who accounted for 18% of the students taking EXPLORE.

FINDING SIX: Even without further interventions to accelerate progress, districts should see increases in their college going rates.

Table 5. Past College Going Averages Compared to EXPLORE Student Intent

District	5 year Average College Going	2006 College Going	2006 College Going Adjusted	2010 EXPLORE Intend College Going	2010 Undecided / Other Plan / No Response
Canton	33%	38%	53%	55.5%	36.3%
Marlington	50%	47%	62%	59.7%	28.4%
Plain	56%	56%	71%	78.9%	11.7%

DISCUSSION: Based on student expressions of intent, there should be an increase in the percentage of students going on to college in two out of three districts. However, it should be noted again that the number of students who fell into “undecided/other plans/no response” category is substantial and can have a dramatic influence on the college going rate.

The data source for Table 5 is the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) *High School to College Transition Reports*. Latest published data includes five year averages for each district’s college going rate to Ohio colleges and universities only.

OBR estimates that another 15% of high school graduates enroll out of state. This is reflected in the column, College Going Adjusted. The second source of data are the current EXPLORE test results and student answers about their college going plans. While percentages are also listed for those undecided, not responding or having other plans, students planning military, apprenticeships, no further training or career-technical schools are not included as OBR data does not include these options.

FINDING SEVEN: Even without further interventions to accelerate progress, all districts should see increases in their average ACT Composite scores based on the current performance of this cohort of students.

Table 6. ACT Averages Compared to EXPLORE and Projected ACT Scores

District	5 Year ACT Average	2006 ACT Average	2010 EXPLORE Average	2013 Projected ACT Average
Canton	19	19	14.3	20.3
Marlington	21	21	16.6	22.6
Plain	21	21	16.5	22.5

DISCUSSION: ACT, Inc. calculates that there is a typical growth of between 2 to 3 points between tests based on average growth in academic achievement between the 8th and 12th grades. Here the upper limit of 3 points is used to project future ACT scores for students in Canton, Marlington and Plain. District strategies to accelerate this growth will result in even higher averages.



IV. Survey Results

A Note About Methodology

In order to gather evidence in support of grant objectives, separate pre and post test surveys (apart from questions included as part of the EXPLORE Test) were administered to curriculum directors, faculty, students and parents both in the fall and spring to see if the EXPLORE experience had been accompanied by a shift in attitudes and beliefs.

These surveys suffered from the same limitations that generally afflict all survey research. These are return rates and internal validity. Internal validity here means the degree to which one can

be assured that how respondents answer questions also represents what non-responders think as well.

The district with the lowest rate of return on student surveys was Plain Local with approximately 58% of the 763 students taking EXPLORE. Marlinton Local, on the other hand, had more students respond in the spring (191) than actually took the EXPLORE test (169). The assumption here is that those students missed the actual testing day but later responded to the separate questionnaire. Canton City Schools had a 91.8% response rate in the fall and 98% in the spring of its 512 EXPLORE students.

Results

FINDING ONE: In general, curriculum directors saw positive changes in teacher familiarity about the purpose and use of the EXPLORE Test.

DISCUSSION: Curriculum directors (CDs) are well positioned to see changes both in teaching and district culture. Their assistance in implementing this project was invaluable.

CDs were asked a series of key questions (see appendix) in fall and spring of the project year. Their responses are indicative of subtle shifts in district culture and appear to support the notion that the EXPLORE Test both increased district knowledge and raised awareness. For instance, by spring all CDs believed their teachers were seeing EXPLORE as a pre-college admissions test. Conversely, there was less certainty that curriculum and materials were aligned to support college readiness.

FINDING TWO: There was growth in the percentage of students who considered it “very likely” that they would eventually get a college degree.

Table 7. Student Belief That “I Will Eventually Get a College Degree”

Response	Plain		Canton		Marlington	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Very Likely	58.6%	68%	57.5%	61.6%	48.7%	53%
	258	276	270	309	90	106
Somewhat Likely	36.8%	27.3%	37.9%	33.4%	41.6%	37%
	162	111	178	168	77	74
Not Too Likely	3.4%	3.7%	4.0%	4.6%	7%	9%
	15	15	19	23	13	9
Not Likely At All	1.1%	1.0%	0.6%	0.4%	2.7%	1.5%
	5	4	3	2	5	3
Total Responses	440	406	470	502	185	192

DISCUSSION: Students were polled about their belief they would eventually receive a college degree to see if there were changes in attitude throughout the school year. This was different than the EXPLORE test question on post secondary plans. With the previous caveats in place on data collection, there is the appearance of movement from the somewhat to very likely category.

FINDING THREE: Students believed that they gained in knowledge about what coursework was necessary to succeed in college or the workplace.

Table 8. Student Perceived Knowledge About Necessary HS Coursework to Succeed in College or the Workplace

	Plain		Canton		Marlington	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Know High School Courses Needed for a 4 Year College	21.9%	41.6%	35%	37.7%	25.4%	44.8%
	96	169	164	186	47	90
Know High School Courses Needed for a 2 Year College	8.0%	9.1%	12.3%	14.0%	1.6%	8.5%
	35	37	58	69	3	17
Know High School Courses Needed To Get Job I Want	10.7%	11.1%	10.2%	10.3%	13.5%	11.4%
	47	45	48	51	25	23
Don't Know What Courses	59.4%	38.2%	42.4%	38.1%	59.5%	35.3%
	260	155	199	188	110	71

DISCUSSION: One of the key outcomes sought in this grant was that students should display a greater understanding about the importance of their studies. Students were asked whether they believed that they knew what courses were necessary in high school to succeed in college or the workplace. Based on this indicator, there was a dramatic positive shift between fall and spring.

FINDING FOUR: A large percentage of parents in all three districts believe that their students will go on to college. This percentage increased from the fall to the spring administrations of the survey.

Table 9. Parent Belief That Student Will Go to College

	Plain		Canton		Marlington	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Agree	88.3%	95.6%	79.6%	84%	77.8%	82%
	250	131	78	21	42	32
Disagree	0.7%	1.5%	2.0%	4.0%	0.0%	5%
	2	2	2	1	0	2
Unsure	10.6%	2.9%	18.4%	12%	18.5%	10.2%
	30	4	18	4	10	4
Don't Know How to Tell	0.35%	0%	0%	0%	3.7%	2.6%
	1	0	0	0	2	1
Total	283	137	98	26	54	39

DISCUSSION: Return rates from parents were quite low for both pre and post surveys, diminishing even further for the latter. Parent surveys were entirely missing from Hartford Middle School in Canton. Generalizing survey data to an entire population is always risky as one does not know how respondents differ from non-respondents. Here, the difficulty is further compounded in that there are no guarantees that pre and post respondents are the same individuals.

Only the most cursory conclusions, therefore, can be drawn from these parent samples and then, only with the caveat, for “those responding” in the fall and spring.

FINDING FIVE: Cost was the primary reason why some parents thought it was not possible for their student to go on to college.

DISCUSSION: While parental agreement that their students will go to college was high, sixty-three parents disagreed or were unsure. Most parents in all districts identified cost as the major factor while small numbers cited academic performance or the need to work. A few parents did not think that college was necessary.

FINDING SIX: The majority of middle school faculty believed before and after EXPLORE that grades 6-8 is the time to start thinking about college.

DISCUSSION: Middle school faculty were asked both in the fall and spring to indicate at what grade level students should first start to seriously think about going to college. The majority of teachers in Canton City and Plain Local indicated grades 6-8, with slightly less than one-half of the Marlinton teachers sharing this belief.

In Canton and Plain, there appeared to be very little change in teacher opinion between the pre and post surveys.

Faculty pre and post surveys suffered from some distinct limitations. In Marlinton, for instance, they were not administered in the fall and only 16 teachers took the fall survey in Plain, as compared to 43 in the spring. Canton City most closely approximated the same number of teachers for pre and post, though numbers varied widely at Hartford Middle School.

FINDING SEVEN: Faculty gained knowledge about high school success skills and EXPLORE’s College Readiness Standards.

Table 9. Faculty Familiarity with HS Success Skills and EXPLORE College Readiness Standards

	Plain		Canton		Marlington	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Familiar with Skills needed by 9th Graders to succeed in HS						
Very	43.8%	54.6%	28.3%	36.2%	n/a	52%
Somewhat	56.3%	40.9%	62.3%	59.6%	n/a	40%
Unfamiliar	0.0%	4.6%	9.4%	4.3%	n/a	8%
Familiar with EXPLORE College Readiness Standards						
Very	0.0%	31.8%	9.4%	8.5%	n/a	12%
Somewhat	12.5%	40.9%	47.2%	63.8%	n/a	36%
Unfamiliar	87.5%	27.3%	43.4%	27.7%	n/a	52%
Familiar with knowledge and skills in your discipline measured By EXPLORE						
Very	0.0%	30.2%	7.8%	14.9%	n/a	24%
Somewhat	18.8%	41.9%	52.9%	53.2%	n/a	36%
Unfamiliar	81.3%	27.9%	39.2%	31.9%	n/a	40%
Number of Respondents	16	43	53	48	n/a	25

DISCUSSION: Faculty were asked about their familiarity with skills needed by 9th graders to succeed in high school. This level appeared to increase and some gains were evident in building familiarity with the EXPLORE College Readiness Standards as well as their understanding of what skills in their discipline EXPLORE measured.

Shifts in the “Very” and “Somewhat” familiar categories indicate that faculty grew in knowledge through the course of the year.



V. Conclusions

This project began with the assumption that the EXPLORE test might prove to be a powerful intervention to help prepare Stark County students for college. In this regard, the project targeted an increase in teacher, student and parent awareness at the middle school level of what was required to be college ready.

The pre and post surveys, subject to limitations, indicate that progress was made towards meeting many of the objectives in the grant, particularly those associated with awareness and understanding. An added benefit was the wealth of information from questions on career and post secondary plans of students associated with the EXPLORE Test itself.

Even though the 1,444 students who took EXPLORE represent only about a third of the county's 8th grade cohort, information gained through this project has presented the first detailed picture, not only of college and career readiness, but also of the mind set of Stark's middle school students.

What has been learned? First there is great certainty on the part of the vast majority

of students and parents that college should be part of the future. Yet, there is also great uncertainty. Over 10% said they were undecided about their post secondary plans; nearly another 10% did not respond. This is a sizable sub-population that requires further examination and, perhaps, new attention by teachers and counselors. The source of the indecision or why students did not respond is unknown.

Student belief that it was very likely they would eventually get a college degree did grow across all three districts between the fall and spring. Did EXPLORE prompt this? We don't know enough to isolate the effect of the test alone. Some of this shift might be due to maturation and the ongoing influence of teachers and staff, something in turn that EXPLORE might be helping.

Indeed, based on the 1,100 (78.6% response) student surveys (not EXPLORE questions) for spring, only 22 students believed they would not go to college; 46 felt it was not too likely. That means that 93.8% considered it very or somewhat likely they would go to college. Yet, the

county's college going rate is 54% in-state, with an estimated 15% out of state. Forty-one percent of in-state students require remediation and only 78% return for a second year. What happens?

There is no simple answer. Many things intervene between an 8th grader's desire to go to college and reality. It's not just a Stark County problem. People are now taking action. The Obama administration has increased Pell grants and reduced the complications of the FAFSA form. The State Board of Education in Ohio has approved college and career ready standards and will approve an aligned assessment system. It is happening in Stark County with the growth of high school based dual credit and this project.

Did the grant succeed? Brian Matthews, Principal of Oakwood Middle School in Plain Local answers this question. Oakwood was one of the pilot schools in the grant.

"We've learned that our students are not thinking about college when they enter high school," Brian Matthews said of students in his district. *"We're making changes so that our students see every day as an opportunity to get ready for college or career. Honestly, I didn't know about EXPLORE prior to this grant and I wasn't familiar with the whole notion of College Access."*

Prompted by the grant, Plain middle school teachers participated in an ACT in-service around Readiness Standards. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are analyzing standards and how they align with middle school curriculum – looking for ways to address student readiness for college or the world of work.

"Our staff recognized lags in vocabulary and writing and has launched a vocabulary initiative. We have word walls in each classroom, vocabulary exercises in our redesigned student agenda books and we're ramping up writing across content areas."

Emphasis on college readiness is reflected in new plans to take middle school students on the road. Plans are underway to take 6th grade students to visit 2 year campuses; 7th grade students to visit Stark County 4 year and private school campuses; and 8th grade students to visit 4 year main campuses beyond Stark County. *"Our kids need to experience a campus – eat in the cafeteria, visit a dorm, see a campus center."* Life Skills classes will include student research on a college they select to learn the costs, the requirements and the application process.

This fall Plain middle school students will attend a College and Career Readiness Fair during the day and families will be invited to attend in the evening.

The impact of this pilot goes beyond middle school. Conversations are planned for 8th and 9th grade teachers – bridging the middle school/high school expectations and curricula. Elementary principals joined middle school principals at the recent ACT conference. Plans are being made to target at risk 5th grade students in college access activities with the goal of instilling hope and motivation.

Plain has involved a panel of families, students, principals and teachers with a team of colleges in planning a December district wide program to provide Plain families and students with "College Knowledge."

“I’ve added a new question to those I ask prospective teachers,” Brian added. “I ask them, ‘Do you think all students can go to college?’ and then I listen carefully. It’s important that our staff believe that all students must be prepared to go.”

Regardless of what happens at the national or state level, until we take it upon ourselves in Stark County to “permeate the culture” we will not become the most educated county in the nation.

NEXT STEPS:

The results of *Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness* have demonstrated that the EXPLORE test can be a valuable middle school intervention to help prepare students for college and career readiness. SEP has requested that OCAN extend its grant and will find additional sources of funding to implement EXPLORE across all 17 Stark County school districts for the 2010-11 academic year.

APPENDIX I

Additional Response by Plain Local



Plain Local Response to EXPLORE (Dave Pilati):

I have attached one document that includes all the new course descriptions that we provided to students during the scheduling process. The descriptions for honors courses is vague, but I did include the “consideration criteria” that we offered to parents and students as they were attempting to decide if enrolling in honors courses was the right decision. It shows how we asked parents/students to consider EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT data when they were attempting to make enrollment decisions.

Also, our numbers are actually as follows:

- 3 new AP courses
- 2 new elective courses
- 11 new honors courses

NEW COURSES AT GLENOAK HIGH SCHOOL 2010-11

AP World History (1.0 credit) The AP World History course is designed to provide a college-level experience for students. The purpose of the course is to provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of humans in history through their interactions between societies and their impact on one another. The chronological framework covered will be from 8000 B.C.E. to the present. The course is designed around 5 major themes:

- Interaction between humans and the environment
- Development and interaction of cultures
- State-building, expansion, and conflict
- Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems
- Development and transformation of social structures

AP Statistics (1.0 credit)

The purpose of the AP course in statistics is to introduce students to the major concepts and tools for collecting, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from data. Students are exposed to four broad conceptual themes that include 1) Exploring Data: Describing patterns and departures from patterns, 2) Sampling and Experimentation: Planning and conducting a study, 3) Anticipating Patterns: Exploring random phenomena using probability and simulation, and 4) Statistical Inference: Estimating population parameters and testing hypotheses.

AP Biology (1.0 credit)

The AP Biology course is a laboratory course that is designed to be the equivalent of a two-semester college introductory biology course usually taken by biology majors during their first year. AP Biology includes topics such as molecules & cells, heredity & evolution, and organisms & populations. All students will need to take a regular Biology or Honors Biology class before taking AP Biology.

Sociology (1/2 credit)

Students will EXPLORE the concepts and theories necessary to learning about our social world. Topics for study will include the evolution of human relationships, the nature of large-and small-scale groups, social stratification, the organizational structure of society, social changes over time, race, ethnic, and gender relations.

Earth Science (1.0 credit)

Earth Science is the study of the fundamental processes that shape the Earth. In this course, students will discuss the materials and forces that have transfigured the earth throughout time. Discussion will include surface features and interior layers of our planet. Students will examine the relationship between the movement of tectonic plates and the evolution of organisms over geologic time by studying the fossil record (paleontology). Links will be made between the climatic changes in the oceans and the atmosphere. Finally, students will EXPLORE the relationships between celestial objects such as planets, stars, comets, and asteroids while trying to unlock the mysteries of our universe (astronomy).

GLENOAK HIGH SCHOOL HONORS COURSES INFORMATION

GlenOak students have the opportunity to enroll in one or more of the following honors courses:

- Honors English I
- Honors Algebra I
- Honors Integrated Physical Science
- Honors English II
- Honors Geometry
- Honors Biology
- Honors World Studies
- Honors Algebra II
- Honors Chemistry
- Honors Spanish II
- Honors Spanish III

Although honors courses may include a small amount of additional content than the regular courses contain, the most notable difference will be the fact that the honors courses will teach same content as the regular courses but at a higher and more rigorous level by going deeper into content. For example, a regular English I course may teach the objectives associated with the ACT College-Readiness Standards within the ACT score range of 1 to 23, while the Honors English I course may teach the same objectives associated with those same College-Readiness standards but also include content that is connected with the standards that are in the ACT score range of 24 to 36 as well. As a result, students will learn the same concepts but will be applying them at a higher level. To access the ACT College Readiness Standards, go online to <http://www.act.org/standard/> and click on the link on right side titled “College Readiness Standards.”

In order for students to experience success in honors courses in general, students should possess the following skills and/or characteristics:

- A true love of learning in that particular subject
- High reading ability
- Excellent time management skills
- Self-motivation
- The desire to be highly challenged in a particular subject
- Excellent study skills

Students who meet and/or demonstrate the following criteria will have a better chance of being successful in each of the following honors courses. *It is not mandatory that students meet all the criteria below, but they are simply items for students and parents to consider when determining if enrolling in an honors course is the best interest of the student.*

Honors English I

- EXPLORE score of 19 or higher in English
- EXPLORE score of 18 or higher in Reading
- OAT scores in the “Advanced” range in Reading and Writing on most recent attempt
- Earned a high “A” average in 8th Grade Language Arts or an average of “A” or “B” in Enriched 8th Grade Language Arts
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn Language Arts and a love of reading literature
- Possesses above average writing ability

Honors English II

- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in English when taken in 9th grade (19 if taken in 8th grade)
- EXPLORE score of 19 or higher in Reading when taken in 9th grade (18 if taken in 8th grade)
- OAT scores in the “Advanced” range in Reading and Writing when taken in 8th grade
- Practice OGT score in the “Advanced” range in Reading when taken in 9th grade
- Scored 160 or higher on English 9 ACT End-of-Course Exam
- Earned a high “A” average in English I
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn Language Arts and a love of reading literature
- Possesses above average writing ability

Honors Algebra I

- EXPLORE Score of 19 or higher in Mathematics
- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Reading
- Scored in the “Advanced” range in Math and in Reading on most recent OAT
- Earned a high “A” average in 8th grade math
- EXPLORE score of 18 or higher in English when taken in 9th grade
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn mathematics

Honors Geometry

- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Math
- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Reading
- Scored 150 or higher on Algebra I ACT End-of-Course Exam
- Scored in the “Advanced” range in Math and in Reading on most recent OAT
- Earned a high “A” average in Algebra I or an average of “A” or “B” in Honors Algebra I
- Practice OGT score in “Advanced” when taken in 9th grade
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn mathematics

Honors Algebra II

- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Math and/or PLAN score of 22 or higher in Math
- EXPLORE score of 18 or higher in Reading and/or PLAN score of 20 or higher in Reading
- ACT score of 25 or higher in Math
- Scored 150 or higher on Geometry ACT End-of-Course Exam
- Scored in the “Advanced” range in Math and in Reading on OGT (or OAT if no OGT)
- Earned a high “A” average in Geometry or an average of “A” or “B” in Honors Geometry
- Scored in “Advanced” range in Math on OGT
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn mathematics

Honors Integrated Physical Science

- EXPLORE Score of 20 or higher in Science
- EXPLORE Score of 19 or higher in English
- EXPLORE Score of 20 or higher in Reading
- Scored in “Advanced” range on most recent OAT in Reading
- Scored in “Advanced” or “Accelerated” range on most recent OAT in science
- Earned a high “A” average in 8th Grade Science
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn science including the desire to do a science fair project

Honors Biology

- EXPLORE Score of 20 or higher in Science
- EXPLORE Score of 20 or higher in Reading
- Scored in “Advanced” range on most recent OAT in Reading
- Scored in “Advanced” or “Accelerated” range on most recent OAT in science
- Earned a high “A” average in 9th Grade Science
- Possesses a true desire to study and learn science including the desire to do a science fair project

Honors Chemistry

- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Science and/or PLAN score of 21 or higher in Science
- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Math and/or PLAN score of 22 or higher in Math
- EXPLORE score of 20 or higher in Reading and/or PLAN score of 22 or higher in Reading
- ACT score of 24 or higher in Science
- Scored in “Advanced” range on OGT in Science
- Scored 157 or higher on Biology ACT End-of-Course Exam
- Earned an “A” or “B” average in Biogenetics or earned a high “A” average in 10th grade

Integrated Biological Science

- Possesses a true desire to study and learn science including the desire to do a science fair project

Honors World Studies

- EXPLORE score of 18 or higher in Reading
- Earned a high “A” average in 8th grade Social Studies
- Participated in and excelled in Ohio Model United Nations in middle school
- Possesses a true to desire to study and learn social studies and enjoys reading

Honors Spanish II

- EXPLORE score of 19 or higher in Reading
- Earned an “A” or “B” average in Honors Spanish I
- Earned a high “A” average in Spanish I AND teacher recommendation

Honors Spanish III

- PLAN score of 21 or higher in Reading and/or ACT score of 25 or higher in Reading
- Earned an “A” or “B” average in Honors Spanish II

Appendix II

Survey Instruments

8th Grade Student Survey

1. What school do you attend?
 - 1 Lehman Middle School
 - 2 Hartford Middle School
 - 3 Crenshaw Middle School
 - 4 Glenwood Middle School
 - 5 Oakwood Middle School
 - 6 Marlinton Middle School
 - 7 School for the Arts

2. What is your gender?
 - 1 Male
 - 2 Female

3. Has anyone in your family (father, mother, guardian, sister, brother) taken college classes?
 - 1 Yes
 - 2 No

4. How likely is it that you will eventually get a college degree?
 - 1 Very likely.
 - 2 Somewhat likely.
 - 3 Not too likely.
 - 4 Not likely at all.

5. What will you do when you graduate from high school?
 - 1 I am sure about my interests and skills.
 - 2 I think I know what I might like to do.
 - 3 I'm not sure about what I am good at.
 - 4 I haven't any idea of what to do.

6. Is there a specific college or job that you would like to learn more about?
 - 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 3 I haven't thought about it.

7. Have your parents/guardian been helpful to you in learning about college or a job?
 - 1 Very helpful
 - 2 Somewhat helpful
 - 3 Not very helpful
 - 4 Not at all helpful
 - 5 I don't know.

8. What do you know about the courses required for college admission?
 - 1 I know what high school courses I will need to be admitted to a four-year college.
 - 2 I know what high school courses I will need to be admitted to a two-year college.
 - 3 I know what high school courses I will need to get the job I want.
 - 4 I don't know what courses I will need.

9. In your opinion what is the best time for a student to start thinking seriously about college?
 - 1 Before 6th grade
 - 2 6th – 8th grades
 - 3 9th grades
 - 4 10th grades
 - 5 11th grades
 - 6 12th grades
 - 7 I don't know.

Middle School Family Survey

Our school district is part of a Stark County pilot project funded by a grant to the Stark Education Partnership. Our 8th grade students took the EXPLORE test last fall to help determine readiness for high school. We are requesting that families complete the following voluntary survey to help us to better support our students and their families. Please fill in the appropriate circles.

1. My student attends:
 - 1 Lehman Middle School
 - 2 Hartford Middle School
 - 3 Crenshaw Middle School
 - 4 Glenwood Middle School
 - 5 Oakwood Middle School
 - 6 Marlinton Middle School
 - 7 School for the Arts

2. What do you know about the academic requirements for high school graduation?
 - 1 I know what will be required of my student.
 - 2 I have an idea but I do not know the exact requirements.
 - 3 I've never been told what the requirements are for graduation.
 - 4 That is my student's responsibility.

3. What do you know about the academic requirements for college admission?
 - 1 I know what will be required of my student.
 - 2 I have an idea but not the exact requirements.
 - 3 I've never been told what the requirements are for admission.
 - 4 It is my student's responsibility to know the requirements.

4. What is your response to the following statement? "My student will go to college."
 - 1 I agree. (Please skip to #6)
 - 2 I disagree. (Please answer #5)
 - 3 I am unsure. (Please answer #5)
 - 4 I don't know how to tell. (Please skip to #6)

5. If you do not believe your student will go to college please indicate the reason why:
 - 1 College costs too much.
 - 2 My student does not do well enough in school to go to college.
 - 3 College isn't necessary to get a good job.
 - 4 My student doesn't want to go to college.
 - 5 My student needs to work when he/she graduates from high school.

6. Choose the sentence that best describes your experience:
- 1 My student knows that I expect him/her to apply to college.
 - 2 I have talked to my student about college but will leave the decision up to him or her.
 - 3 My student has come to me about college but I tell them that it is up to him or her.
 - 4 I don't know enough about college to know what to tell my student.
7. In your opinion, what is the best time for a student to start thinking seriously about college?
- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Before 6th grade | 2 6th – 8th grades |
| 3 9th grade | 4 10th grade |
| 5 11th grade | 6 12th grade |
| 7 I don't know | |

Middle School Faculty Survey

As part of our grant agreement for Ready to Go: Increasing Eighth Grade Readiness for Success The Stark Education Partnership is requesting that teachers complete this survey. Your anonymous participation last fall and today will help determine the impact of the strategy on student readiness for success in high school.

1. I am a teacher at:

- 1 Lehman Middle School
- 2 Hartford Middle School
- 3 Crenshaw Middle School
- 4 Glenwood Middle School
- 5 Oakwood Middle School
- 6 Marlinton Middle School
- 7 School for the Arts

2. Number of years you have been teaching at the middle school level:

- 1 1 – 5
- 2 6 – 10
- 3 11 – 15
- 4 16 – 20
- 5 Over 20

3. How familiar are you with the skills needed by 9th graders to succeed in high school?

- 1 Very familiar
- 2 Somewhat familiar
- 3 Unfamiliar

4. In your opinion what is the best time for a student to start thinking seriously about college?

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Before 6th grade | 2 6th – 8th grade |
| 3 9th grade | 4 10th grade |
| 5 11th grade | 6 12th grade |
| 7 I don't know | |

5. About 52% of Stark County students go on to college in Ohio. In our district the percentage is about

- 1 35%
- 2 45%
- 3 55%
- 4 65%
- 5 I don't know.

6. What percentage of our district's students persists to the second year of college (in Ohio)?
 - 1 40%
 - 2 50%
 - 3 70%
 - 4 80%
 - 5 I don't know.

7. How familiar are you with the EXPLORE Test College Readiness Benchmarks?
 - 1 Very familiar
 - 2 Somewhat familiar
 - 3 Unfamiliar

8. How familiar are you with the knowledge and skills in your discipline that are measured by the EXPLORE Test's College Readiness Benchmarks?
 - 1 Very familiar
 - 2 Somewhat familiar
 - 3 Unfamiliar

Curriculum Director's Survey

District: _____

Please share your perceptions of your district's teaching staff on the following issues:

<i>Middle and high school teachers in my district . . .</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
know about the EXPLORE test.					
see EXPLORE as a pre-college admissions test.					
are familiar with ACT's College Readiness Standards and Benchmarks.					
realize that EXPLORE can give them a measure of their students' college readiness.					
see the relationship between EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT tests.					
believe they have an important role in preparing students for college.					
understand what students need to know to succeed in college.					
work to align their courses for college readiness.					

Please rate YOUR own knowledge on the following:

<i>I have knowledge . . .</i>				
	No Knowledge	Some Knowledge	Knowledgeable	Very Knowledgeable
about the EXPLORE test.				
about ACT's College Readiness Standards and Benchmarks.				
about the EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT Tests and how they inter-relate and predict college readiness.				

Please share your opinion on the following:

<i>In our district . . .</i>					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
teachers see all students as potential college students.					
parents expect that their children will go on to college.					
students see themselves going on to college.					
counselors see all students as potential college students.					
our middle school curriculum is already well aligned for college readiness.					
our high school curriculum is already well aligned for college readiness.					
our instructional materials support college readiness.					