

EXPLORE Pilot

Author:

Evaluation Report, 2000-2001

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The purpose of this report is to evaluate the costs and benefits of administering the EXPLORE assessment during its pilot year and to present information for decision makers to use in determining whether to continue administration of the instrument and if it is continued, to determine the best grade level and time of year for its administration. Additionally, this report will address actions that the district could take to improve the effectiveness of future use of EXPLORE.

This report includes a description of EXPLORE, featuring a history of the adoption and use of EXPLORE in AISD and an analysis of the cost of administering EXPLORE and using the results. The use of the test is described, including administration and use of the results by students, faculty, and staff. All parties' assessments of the usefulness of the results are considered. Finally, issues related to the timing of future administrations of the instrument are presented.

EXPLORE OVERVIEW

In spring of 1999, the EXPLORE assessment, a product of ACT, Inc., was selected for administration to AISD students by a committee with members from the departments of Accountability, Curriculum and School Improvement, and Guidance and Counseling, and the offices of Systemwide Testing and Program Evaluation. EXPLORE includes English, Reading, Math, and Science/Reasoning subtests and a career-related interest inventory. Further, the assessment is designed to correlate with the ACT college entrance examination. EXPLORE was chosen because of its association with a college entrance examination, because it provides nationally normed achievement data, and because it includes a career-related interest inventory.

During October 2000, EXPLORE was administered to AISD students in grade 9. Results were received from ACT and disseminated to campuses and students in November. The initial purchase of the test cost \$37,991. This included 5,880 reusable test booklets. An additional \$200 was spent to copy and disseminate results to teachers and counselors throughout the district, and \$1,248 was spent on study guides to be used

by teachers. The 2001 administration cost \$22,881. This included purchase of study guides for teachers and of 990 new test booklets to replace booklets that were lost or destroyed.

Prior to the adoption of EXPLORE, AISD staff did not use a single instrument that yielded both achievement and career-related data. However, both types of data were gathered and used in the district. In addition to the TAAS and TPRI, to measure student achievement, AISD officials administer the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades 5 and 8. The ITBS is a nationally normed achievement test with subtests in English, Math, Reading, Science, and Social Studies.

For career planning, district counselors administer a locally developed instrument as part of the Individual Academic Career Plan (IACP). The IACP uses eight career categories that are based largely on the Career Clusters established by the Department of Education. AISD counselors have modified the clusters to represent the high number of technical jobs in Austin. Age-appropriate versions of the IACP are given yearly to all students in grades 5-12. A class period is set aside each year for students to complete the IACP and to review it with a teacher or guidance counselor.

In addition to the IACP, high school counseling offices at 11 high school campuses and the Akins campus have access to DISCOVER career planning software. Use of the software varies from campus to campus. DISCOVER is published by ACT. It includes the same interest inventory as EXPLORE and depicts results on ACT's World of Work Map. The software license was provided through a grant managed by The Capitol Area Education and Careers Partnership. During the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years, the grant paid the entire licensing fee of \$2,700 per school, or \$32,400. In 2000-01, AISD paid 1/3 of the price, or \$10,800. In 2001-02, the last year of the grant, the Capitol Area Education and Careers Partnership will pay 1/3 of the price, \$10,800. In January, 2002, eight campuses decided to continue paying for the license and four declined. Beginning in 2002-03, the district will have to pay full price to maintain the software license for all campuses that choose to use it.

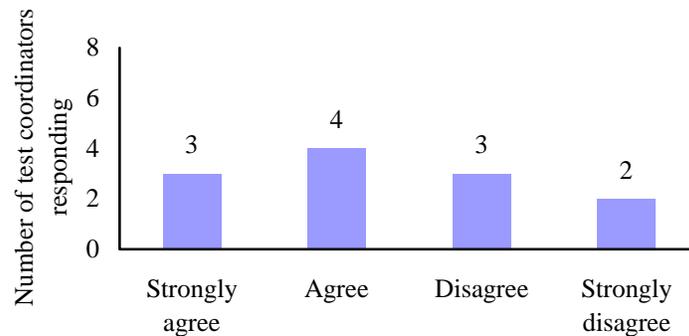
ADMINISTRATION OF EXPLORE

EXPLORE was administered to ninth grade students on 12 AISD high school campuses. Of the 6,510 ninth grade students in the district, 4,771 (73%) completed the

examination. Administration took 3 hours a day for 2 consecutive days. All examinees at each school were assembled in one room for the duration of the test.

Test coordinators at all 12 schools responded to a survey regarding the administration of EXPLORE. As shown in figure 1, 7 respondents supported a statement that administration had gone smoothly on their campuses, 3 strongly; 5 respondents disagreed with the statement, 2 of them strongly.

Figure 1: Test coordinators' responses to the item, "Administration of EXPLORE on our campus in fall, 2000 went smoothly." (n = 12)



Test coordinators also were asked to list specific problems they had experienced with the administration of EXPLORE. Of the 12 respondents, 8 reported that the administration took too long and caused scheduling problems; 5 reported that students did not take EXPLORE seriously; 2 reported lack of materials, both having had difficulty finding calculators and one not having had enough test booklets. Finally, 1 coordinator reported not having had a clear understanding of the purpose of the test.

USE OF EXPLORE RESULTS

EXPLORE results were shipped by ACT directly to each campus in November, 2000. District staff held a series of meetings to discuss use of the results with campus representatives and curriculum heads in the areas of counseling, English, math, and science.

Materials used at these meetings included supplementary study guides produced by ACT. Curriculum staff requested that study guides be distributed to teachers. Staff from the central office gave copies of the study guides to curriculum representatives, and

staff from the Office of Systemwide testing requested copies For their teachers. Copies were ordered and distributed to teachers at all high school campuses in May, 2001.

Use of EXPLORE results by teachers

Of 12 teachers responding to a survey distributed in May, 2001 regarding the use of EXPLORE results, 1 reported using the results of the academic subtests in making referrals to AVID, 2 reported that the academic subtest results arrived too late to be useful, 1 reported not using them, and 8 responded that they had not received EXPLORE results.

Of 3 teachers responding to an item asking how they used the interest inventory and career information, 1 reported discussing it with students in conjunction with the IACP, 1 reported not using it, and 1 reported that it came too late to be used.

Teachers also received a survey regarding the usefulness of the supplementary materials requested by curriculum staff and distributed in May, 2001. Of 9 teachers who responded, 4 reported that they had not used them, and 5 reported that they had not received them.

Perceived usefulness of academic results

Of 11 teachers responding to an item on the usefulness of EXPLORE results, 1 reported that the results were very useful, 2 reported that they were somewhat useful, 1 reported that they were not very useful, and 7 reported that they had not received the results.

Use of EXPLORE results by counselors

Of 10 counselors responding to an open-ended item on how EXPLORE results had been used, 7 reported that they had used the results together with the IACP, 3 reported having used them for course planning, and 1 reported not having used them. Of 4 counselors responding to an open-ended item asking what information comes from EXPLORE that cannot be gleaned from ITBS, 2 counselors reported that EXPLORE allows them to relate interest inventory information to academic achievement data, and one reported that the science/reasoning and rhetoric tests in EXPLORE are better than those in ITBS. Of 6 counselors who responded to an item on the use of the

supplementary materials offered by ACT, 4 reported that they had used the materials, 1 reported not having used them, and 1 reported not having received them.

Perceived usefulness of career results

Of 11 counselors responding to an item on the usefulness of EXPLORE interest inventory results, 1 reported that they were very useful, 6 reported that they were somewhat useful, 2 reported that they were not very useful, 1 reported that they were not at all useful, and 1 reported not having received the results.

Use of EXPLORE results by students

Students in two focus groups were asked to comment on their use of the academic subtests. Members of one group had all stated an intention of going to college. The other group was mixed, with 2 students who intended to go to college and 4 who did not.

Members of the college-bound group remembered receiving the scores, but only one member understood the percentile ranking system. Everyone in the group reported having discussed the interest inventory with a counselor in conjunction with the IACP. Members of this group agreed that EXPLORE was more businesslike than the IACP, but most said the results were not in line with their interests. One member commented that the technical portion of EXPLORE seemed heavily weighted toward non-creative jobs.

Several members of the mixed group could not remember receiving their academic results. Most members of the group reported having discussed the interest inventory results with a teacher or counselor in conjunction with the IACP. One member reported seeing other students with interest inventory results, but did not remember receiving his own. Group members agreed that neither the IACP nor EXPLORE was very useful. They complained that the IACP lacked specificity and that the EXPLORE results were not in agreement with their interests.

Neither group could recall using the academic results or discussing them with teachers or counselors, though members of both groups reported feeling good when they saw high scores.

SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS

AISD administrators were able to add 12 supplemental items to EXPLORE. The items used were related to computer use, work plans, tutoring and community

involvement. Item writers from the Office of Program Evaluation and the Office of Technology Services reported in interviews that they had collaborated with an administrator in the area of dropout retention. However, that administrator left the position, and the incoming administrator was not made aware of the EXPLORE results. Administrators in the Office of Technology Services stated in interviews that they had not been made aware of the results.

TIMING OF EXPLORE IN THE CONTEXT OF AISD'S TESTING SCHEDULE

The testing calendar for the 2001-02 school year shows that eighth grade students are scheduled to take 15 district-level tests. During the same period, ninth grade students are scheduled to take 7 district-level tests. Eighth grade teachers and principals expressed reluctance to add another test to the schedule and district administrators agreed, so EXPLORE was administered early in the ninth grade in the 2001-02 school year.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the pilot year of EXPLORE at AISD, difficulties with administration of the examination limited the effectiveness of the assessment. Most of the problems with administration stemmed from confusion over test scheduling requirements and resource shortages. The Office of Systemwide Testing assisted campuses with scheduling and resource problems during the 2001-02 administration.

Additionally, there was widespread failure in the district to use the results of EXPLORE. Counselors reported having used the interest inventory portion, but teachers and students reported that they hadn't used the academic results. Administrators reported that they had not used the supplementary items.

Distribution was the most frequently reported problem. Results were sent to each campus office in November, but many teachers reported that they had not received results in time to use them. Similarly, central office administrators who could have used the supplemental items related to instructional technology or dropout retention, never received them.

Another likely impediment to use of the results was difficulty interpreting them. Study guides, which may have helped teachers to interpret EXPLORE data and use them

in lesson planning, were not widely distributed until May, 2001. Also, students reported that they did not understand the scale score reporting system used by ACT, and the district offered no system to explain results to them.

EXPLORE includes the only nationally normed achievement test currently administered at the high school level in AISD. In addition, curriculum staff reportedly believe that EXPLORE is a good predictor of student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, which will be the state standard assessment, beginning in 2003. EXPLORE also includes potentially valuable career information. Those data are only valuable, though, if they are used, and EXPLORE is expensive and time-consuming. District officials should monitor the use of EXPLORE results in 2001-02. Score reports should be divided into classroom groups and delivered to teachers. Also, the results should be entered into SASI. Once these steps are taken, if the achievement data are not used enough to warrant the costs, officials should discontinue administration of EXPLORE.

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