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September 12, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Pamela Herman

RE: STAFF BRIEF: COLLEGE/WORKPLACE READINESS AND HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN: ACT'S COLLEGE/WORKPLACE READINESS EXAMINATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The 2006 Interim Workplan for the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) includes monthly presentations regarding the college/workplace readiness and high school redesign. This presentation focuses on the college and workplace readiness assessments and other services provided by ACT, Inc. (ACT).

Issues:

In 2003, after hearing testimony from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and other national experts about the importance of high school-college alignment, the LESC endorsed legislation that was enacted to require that high school curricula and end-of-course tests be aligned with the placement tests administered by two- and four-year public postsecondary institutions in New Mexico.

In August 2006, the LESC heard a presentation that summarized the alignment process and progress in implementation, outlined approaches being taken by other states to embed college and workplace readiness standards in high school assessment systems, and offered options for the committee to consider that would hasten the implementation of the law.

The LESC requested more information about several options, including a presentation about ACT assessments that might be offered or required so that high school students will know if they are college and workplace ready, and that will at the same time meet the requirements of the 2003 law on alignment.

ACT Assessments

ACT offers an integrated, longitudinal, standards-based system of assessments and information known as the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) intended to measure individual readiness for college and the workplace and to guide choices (see Attachment for a more detailed explanation). EPAS includes three academic achievement assessments in English, mathematics, reading, and science; WorkKeys is a workplace readiness assessment system with nine components. The assessments are as follows:

- EXPLORE provides baseline information on the academic abilities of 8th and 9th grade students that teachers can use to help them plan high school coursework.
- PLAN is a “pre-ACT” assessment that provides a mid-point review of tenth graders’ progress toward educational and career goals while there is still time to make interventions needed to ensure students can reach them.
- The ACT test measures students’ academic readiness to make a successful transition to postsecondary education. Approximately 40 percent of high school graduates in the United States take the ACT while in high school; approximately 60 percent of New Mexico graduates take it.
- WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system measuring “real world” skills that ACT says employers believe are critical to job success, valuable for any occupation and at any level of education.

According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS), various reports indicate that administering EPAS works to increase the number of students taking a college preparatory curriculum, to help the state make progress in closing the achievement gap, and in spurring a growing number of students to make plans for college and to follow through on those plans.

ACT Standards for Transition and College-Readiness Benchmarks

According to ACT, the EPAS assessments are standards-based, such that scores in a particular range on a given subject on one of the tests usually are associated with the demonstration of skills and knowledge that meet certain definitions. These are contained in the ACT “Standards for Transition.” The standards are linked to what ACT calls “Pathways for Transition,” statements that suggest learning experiences from which students in a particular score range are likely to benefit. ACT states that this system is designed to provide a coherent framework for students and counselors and a consistent skills focus for teachers from grades 8 through 12.

ACT has also identified “college readiness benchmarks,” the minimum EPAS test scores that correlate to a 50 percent probability of earning a B or better in an entry-level credit-bearing college course: English Composition, social sciences, College Algebra, or Introduction to Biology. ACT has also established correlations between the EPAS system and the COMPASS computer-adaptive course placement tests used by colleges.

Statewide Administration of EPAS Assessments

ACT states that statewide administration of ACT assessments provides all students, including those who have never considered college as an option, with the opportunity to identify academic strengths and weaknesses, explore educational and career interests, set high standards for academic achievement, and prepare to meet their educational and career goals. Statewide ACT test administration also increases awareness among educators and policymakers of the important role that educational planning and preparation play in ensuring college readiness. ACT also states that since the ACT test is widely accepted by virtually all postsecondary institutions across the United States for college admission, it provides students with a credential that they can use when they leave high school.

Several states either require students to take components of the EPAS, or pay the costs for those who wish to take one or more components:

- In 2001, the **Louisiana** Board of Regents, the state higher education authority, began offering the EXPLORE and PLAN as part of a statewide *Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education*, to increase public awareness of the importance of academic preparation and to raise academic standards for college admission, according to ACT. The program has expanded from voluntary participation by schools to include every public middle and high school in the state. Since the Board of Regents EPAS program was implemented, ACT reports:
 - greatly increased participation in EXPLORE and PLAN;
 - increased participation in the ACT test, which students pay for, by approximately 7.0 percent to approximately 85 percent of graduates in 2005;
 - increased average ACT composite scores, for all students and for most racial and ethnic groups;
 - average score gains on the ACT test by low income students that are equal to or better than higher-income students; and
 - average scores gains on the ACT test for all students in all subjects that equal or exceed the national norm.
- Since 1993, the **Arkansas** Department of Higher Education and the **Oklahoma** Board of Regents have paid the full cost for any student who wishes to participate in EXPLORE, PLAN and/or the ACT test. ACT states that approximately 95 percent of grade 8 and 10 students elect to take the tests; more students are taking the ACT; more African-American and Latino students are completing a college-preparatory curriculum; more students are attending postsecondary institutions; and fewer college students need remediation.
- Since 2000, the **South Carolina** Legislature has appropriated funds annually to provide every 10th grader an opportunity to take either PLAN or the PSAT. In school year 2005-2006, the South Carolina Department of Education provided students in grades 8 and 9 the opportunity to take EXPLORE. The Legislature will consider a proposal in 2007 to provide funding for EXPLORE, PLAN, and the ACT.
- Since 2000, the **Florida** Legislature has provided every public school district with funds to select either PLAN or the PSAT for administration to any 10th grade students choosing to take it. The tests are administered to support guidance counselors and advanced placement

programs. Test participation has increased by approximately 300 percent since the program began, with gains of approximately 400 percent among African-Americans and 520 percent among Latino students.

- **West Virginia** law requires every student in grade 8 to take EXPLORE, to provide information for use in developing an “individualized student transition plan,” and all students in grade 10 to take PLAN.
- In 2005, the **Minnesota** Legislature passed a law allowing districts and charter schools to take part in the EPAS “to provide a longitudinal, systematic approach to student educational and career planning, assessment, instructional support, and evaluation.”

Two states, Illinois and Colorado, have required all high school juniors to take the ACT test since 2001.

- **Colorado** statute requires that all students enrolled in the 11th grade in public schools throughout the state shall take a standardized, curriculum-based achievement college entrance examination selected by the state Department of Education, administered throughout the United States and relied upon by institutions of higher education that, at a minimum, tests reading, writing, mathematics and science. The department shall pay all the costs associated with administering the exam.
 - The Colorado Department of Education selected the ACT test to meet the requirements of the statute.
 - The results of the ACT are required by law to be included on a student’s transcript.
 - Colorado does not use ACT test results to measure adequate yearly progress (AYP) for purposes of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Colorado administers a state standards-based assessment to all 10th graders for AYP purposes.
- **Illinois** statute requires all school districts that operate high school programs to annually administer the Prairie State Achievement Examination after March 11 in the second semester of 11th grade to measure student performance in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, based on academic standards established by the State Board of Education.
 - The Illinois Board of Education selected the ACT, a state-developed science assessment and two WorkKeys components (Reading for Information and Applied Mathematics). The ACT plus Writing will be required beginning in spring 2007.
 - The law requires that students be given two opportunities to take the examination.
 - The state board must establish “cut scores” in each area that qualify a student to receive a Prairie State Achievement Award for academic excellence.
 - A student must take the exam in order to receive a high school diploma unless exempt because of an individualized education plan, lack of English language proficiency, or enrollment in an adult education program.
 - Illinois intends to use the Prairie State Achievement Examination for AYP purposes. However, the Illinois assessment system still has a status of “approval pending” through the peer review process of the US Department of Education (USDE).

- According to ACT, since making the ACT test mandatory in Colorado and Illinois, in-state college enrollment has increased significantly, particularly among low-income and minority students. ACT also reports that since 2001, the average composite scores have increased in both states, and that more students in Colorado achieved scores at least at the low end of college readiness.

Two other states, Kentucky and Michigan, have instituted mandatory ACT tests for spring 2007.

- In 2006, the **Kentucky** Legislature amended state law to create the Kentucky Work and College Readiness Examination, requiring that no later than school year 2007-2008 the assessment system must include the following:
 - high school and college readiness exams in English, reading, mathematics and science in grades 8, 10, and 11:
 - ✓ in grade 8, the Kentucky Board of Education has selected EXPLORE;
 - ✓ in grade 10, the board has selected PLAN;
 - ✓ in grade 11, the statute specifies the ACT test;
 - academic counseling and remediation for students based on their scores, as follows:
 - ✓ for those who show a high degree of high school or college readiness, counseling to take accelerated courses, including advanced placement courses;
 - ✓ for those whose scores indicate they will need remediation to be placed in entry level college courses, counseling to participate in “accelerated learning designed to address. . . identified academic deficiencies prior to high school graduation” that high schools must develop and implement;
 - opportunities for all students in grades 10, 11, and 12 to take WorkKeys Reading for Information, Locating Information and Applied Mathematics exams, with:
 - ✓ intervention for students whose WorkKeys assessments indicate that additional assistance is required; and
 - ✓ award of an employability certificate for students who achieve a threshold score;
 - an individual student report that “provides a judgment regarding whether or not a student has met or failed to meet the expectations for each standard assessed; and is designed to assist students, parents, and teachers to identify, assess and remedy academic deficiencies prior to high school graduation”; and
 - a requirement that ACT and WorkKeys scores be included on official high school transcripts.
 - Kentucky uses a state-developed test, the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), for AYP purposes; however, the law provides that in the future, portions of those exams may be replaced by the ACT if it is “shown to provide direct measures of content standards and concepts” in the state core content for assessment.
- In 2005, the **Michigan** Legislature mandated that by school year 2006-2007, a new system of high school assessments named the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) replace the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP).

- The statute requires the MME to include:
 - ✓ assessments in English language arts, mathematics, reading and science that are used by colleges and universities in Michigan for entrance or placement purposes;
 - ✓ one or more tests in applied reading and mathematics skills intended to allow employers to make employment decisions; and
 - ✓ a social studies component.
- The Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction has selected the ACT test, some WorkKeys components, and several “wraparound” Michigan components developed to assess Michigan curriculum content standards that are not assessed on the ACT or WorkKeys.
- The statute provided for a sample of Michigan grade 11 students to take the MME in spring 2006 for purposes of seeking approval to use the exam for AYP purposes.
- The statute provides that if the USDE has not approved the use of the MME for AYP purposes by December 31, 2006, the state shall continue to administer the MEAP exam to students in grade 11.
- Michigan’s assessment system has “approval pending” status as of June 2006, on the basis of issues raised by the USDE peer review process regarding the assessment of students with disabilities.

Background:

ACT, formerly known as the American College Testing Service, is a national not-for-profit organization that offers assessments, research, and data management services related to education and workforce readiness. It is one of two major national college admissions tests providers, the other being the College Board, a not-for-profit corporation that provides the SAT (formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test), the PSAT, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests.

Most, but not all, institutions of higher education that do not have open admissions require applicants to submit scores from either the ACT or the SAT test. A nonprofit advocacy organization, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, reports a list of 730 colleges and universities in the United States that do not require an admissions test either for all students, for those who have a threshold grade point average, or only for out-of-state applicants. Others use the test scores for limited purposes such as placement and advising. The list includes public postsecondary colleges or universities in many states.

Presenters:

Ms. Karen Pennell, Assistant Vice President and Regional Manager, Southwest Region, ACT, Inc., will describe the ACT system of assessments for workplace and college readiness.

Ms. Heather S. Devall, Assistant Commissioner for Assessment and Economic Development, Louisiana Board of Regents, will describe the Louisiana EPAS program.

Questions the committee may wish to consider:

1. Would implementing the EPAS system meet the requirements of the law?
2. What reports does ACT provide to schools that might be comparable to the itemized information currently received for state standards-based assessments by the Public Education Department, school districts and public schools regarding the performance of students on state content and performance standards?
3. How would implementing the EPAS and WorkKeys assessments affect student and family planning for postsecondary education and careers?
4. How would implementing the assessments affect instruction of middle and high school students at the district, school, and classroom level?
5. What would implementing some or all of the EPAS and WorkKeys assessments cost?
6. How would implementing the assessments affect the time required for testing in public schools?
7. How would implementing the assessments affect New Mexico's compliance with NCLB?
8. How would implementing the assessments affect the cost of remedial education at the postsecondary level?
9. How would implementing the assessments affect college attendance by New Mexico students?
10. Would the cost-benefit analysis of implementing subsidized statewide EPAS and WorkKeys assessments change if the system were optional, rather than required?
11. If the EPAS system were implemented to identify student needs for remediation or acceleration, how would schools then be expected to address those needs?

ACT EPAS and WorkKeys

ACT offers an integrated, longitudinal, standards-based system of assessments and information known as the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) intended to measure individual readiness for college and the workplace and guide choices. EPAS programs include three academic achievement assessments and a workplace readiness assessment system, as follows:

- **EXPLORE** provides baseline information on the academic abilities of 8th and 9th grade students that teachers can use to help them plan high school coursework.
 - EXPLORE covers English, mathematics, reading and science. It is scored on a scale from 1-25. The basic exam takes approximately two hours.
 - Additional components include a 72 item student interest inventory and a needs assessment.
 - It is administered year-round during the regular school day at the convenience of the school.
 - Standard turn-around time for scoring and reporting is approximately three weeks.
 - Standard reports include two student score reports, a student planning guide and a score interpretation guide, all available in English and Spanish; and summary reports and early intervention rosters for schools.
 - Optional additional reports for the school include college readiness standards reports and interpretive guides for teachers and administrators describing how well students are meeting readiness standards, and other customized reports.

- **PLAN** is a “pre-ACT” assessment that provides a mid-point review of tenth graders’ progress toward educational and career goals while there is still time to make interventions needed to ensure students can reach them. PLAN is designed as follows:
 - It covers the same subjects as EXPLORE. It is scored on a scale of 1-32. The basic exam takes approximately two hours.
 - Additional components include the interest inventory and needs assessment, high school grade/course (i.e., transcript) information, and Educational Opportunity Service (EOS), “relevant college and scholarship information based on PLAN information” provided by ACT to postsecondary institutions.
 - It is administered by the school, on a date chosen by the school preferably in the fall semester.
 - Standard turn-around time for scoring and reporting is approximately three weeks.
 - Standard reports include student score report, a student score interpretation guide, and material such as school profile summary reports and intervention rosters for the school.
 - Optional additional reports for the school or district include an EXPLORE/PLAN linkage report, college readiness standards reports, and item response summary reports, among others.

- The **ACT** test measures students’ academic readiness to make a successful transition to postsecondary education. Approximately 40 percent of high school graduates in the United States take the ACT while in high school; approximately 60 percent of New Mexico graduates take it. The ACT test is designed as follows:
 - The ACT test is a three-hour exam that covers the same subjects as EXPLORE. It is scored on a scale of 1-36.
 - The test can include an optional 30-minute writing component.
 - Additional components include the interest inventory, high school course/grade information, and a student profile section.
 - It is administered under highly secure conditions, usually on one of six annual national testing dates; for statewide administration a special date can be scheduled.
 - Standard turn-around time for scoring and reporting is approximately four to seven weeks.
 - Standard narrative reports of scores are mailed to students, high schools, and the postsecondary institutions designated by the student. Each school also receives a high school profile report.
 - Optional additional reports include PLAN/ACT linkage reports, college readiness standards reports, and numerous customized reports for schools and districts.

- College readiness benchmarks for the EPAS exams are longitudinally linked, as follows:

| College Course Area | Test | EXPLORE Score | PLAN Score | ACT Score | COMPASS Score |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-----------|---------------|
| English Comp | English | 13 | 15 | 18 | 69 |
| Social Science | Reading | 15 | 17 | 21 | 88 |
| Algebra | Mathematics | 17 | 19 | 22 | 65 |
| Biology | Science | 20 | 21 | 24 | n/a |

- **WorkKeys** is a job skills assessment system measuring “real world” skills that ACT says employers believe are critical to job success, valuable for any occupation and at any level of education. WorkKeys components include:
 - In the area of communications: Business Writing; Listening; Reading for Information; and Writing.
 - In the area of problem solving: Applied Mathematics; Applied Technology; Locating Information; and Observation.
 - In the area of interpersonal skills: Teamwork.
 - Any of the nine assessments can be administered in less than one hour at a desired location.
 - Standard components used by states for career readiness certificates are Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information, which are 40 minutes each.
 - Several components are available in Spanish and as computer-based tests.
 - Standard turn-around time for scoring and reporting is 10 working days.
 - Reports available are similar to EXPLORE and PLAN.