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Evers to request ACT suite for high school accountability and career planning

Proposal part of Agenda 2017

MADISON — All Wisconsin public high school juniors would take the ACT college admissions test under an education budget initiative that would include the four-test ACT suite for career planning and accountability.

State Superintendent Tony Evers announced the proposal, which is part of his 2013-15 education budget request, at a press conference in Pewaukee on Wednesday. “We need to give our students and their families better resources to plan for study and work after high school,” Evers said. “It makes sense to use the ACT to fulfill state and federal testing requirements at the high school level with an exam package that provides so much more than the WKCE: college and career readiness assessments and a college admissions test score.”

Under the plan, all public school ninth-grade students would take the ACT EXPLORE assessment in spring of the 2014-15 school year. The ACT PLAN would be administered in 10th grade and the ACT and WorkKeys assessments in 11th grade. The cost for the state to administer the four tests would be approximately \$7 million. The ACT would replace Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) for mathematics, reading, and English language arts administered to 10th-graders in the fall. The ACT assessment package will add growth measures and improve college and career readiness measures for Wisconsin’s new accountability system.

ACT has decades of experience measuring academic achievement and career aspirations and is the preferred college admissions test in Wisconsin. Currently, about 61 percent of public high school graduates take the ACT at some time in high school. At least 12 states use the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT as part of their state testing program, and five states use WorkKeys in their state testing program for 11th- and 12th-grade students.

The EXPLORE assessment is designed for students to explore both high school and post-high school options, helping to identify strengths and areas where intervention may be needed. The 10th-grade PLAN helps students continue coursework selection and planning for college and career readiness. Both assessments prepare students to take the ACT. The ACT is benchmarked for college readiness; providing a minimum score that yields a likely passing grade in credit-bearing college coursework.

(more)

“States that have adopted the ACT have found ‘diamonds in the rough;’ students who had the skills to go on to college or a high-skills trade, but were not considering that as an option,” Evers said. “Additionally, administering the ACT suite will help us intervene early. It is too costly for students, their families, and our colleges and universities to provide remedial coursework to high school graduates who are not ready for postsecondary studies,” Evers said. “Through the ACT suite, we will strengthen the link between high school and our technical college and university systems because we will have better resources to guide students in their high school course selection and postsecondary plans.”

Currently, parents and a few school districts pay the cost for students to take the ACT. Students in many rural districts lack easy access to a certified ACT testing site. The ACT proposal would train school staff and certify every high school as an ACT testing center. Costs for 11th-grade ACT testing would be paid by the state and used for state and federal accountability requirements. Students who take the ACT a second or third time to improve their score for college admissions purposes would bear the cost of each additional assessment.

WorkKeys provides a job skill assessment that helps students prepare for the workforce whether they plan to go directly into employment, train for a trade, or pursue a technical college or university degree before working. “We expect all students will enter the workforce after high school or college. Helping them prepare for that reality makes sense,” Evers said.

Wisconsin is among states that award a National Career Readiness Certificate based on results of three WorkKeys assessments: Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information. As of May 2012, Wisconsin had issued 5,027 National Career Readiness Certificates. Access to the WorkKeys assessment is available at four workforce development centers, four job and career centers, and five technical colleges. Students who successfully complete the WorkKeys assessment will be eligible for a National Career Readiness Certificate.

“This budget proposal will meet the demand for accountability that matters,” Evers said. “The ACT suite will provide multiple measures of student achievement that give a picture of individual and school growth for high school accountability. Additionally, by providing more career planning resources, we will do our part to meet the demand for more students with technical skills for manufacturing and other high skill careers that industry says is currently unmet.”

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