

Pilot program would replace Ohio Graduation Test with ACT test

By LINDA SALSBERY
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The jobs have already blended: math and language skills are required not only for engineers and researchers, but for the person on the assembly line and the auto mechanic.

"Not everyone should go to college; everyone should have the option to go to college," said Dr. Stephen R. Portch, chancellor emeritus, University System of Georgia, at Friday's ACT/OGT Study Release and Discussion.

He and two other reviewers of the report by the Stark County P-16 Compact with the Stark Education Partnership, Inc. "Advancing Ohio's P-16 Agenda Exit and Entrance Exam?" were among the speakers and panelists to discuss whether one test could meet several needs. P-16 refers to preschool through four years of college, and while the discussion focused on the transition from high school to college, it also emphasizes learning, and preparing begins at an early age.

Could one test measure Ohio's academic standards and serve as a college admissions test (or a career entry test)?

The purpose of the study, supported by several area foundations, was to see whether or not the ACT test, or a combination of the ACT test and Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) could, with some additions, serve as that one test. Principal author of the 106-page report is Joseph A. Rochford, Ph.D., vice president of the Stark Education Partnership.

"I wholeheartedly endorse what the paper says," Portch said, adding that the use of the ACT as an alternative to the OGT (Ohio Graduation Test that will first be required passage for the class of 2007) "might improve rates."

More attention is needed in

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the transition from high school to college, he indicated, especially if the state is to meet its goal to increase by 2015

the undergraduate and graduate enrollment in Ohio's public and private postsecondary institutions by 30 percent (180,000 students).

Portch said Ohio's system now is "extraordinarily inefficient." He pointed to studies that indicate one-third of high school students are not taking core curriculum courses and that about half the students that do go to college need remedial classes.

"With a little more work," he said, the use of the ACT would make the links from high school to college and free up "human capital," eliminating the need for exit tests, high stakes tests, placement tests and perhaps even remedial courses in college.

He cautioned that if the study goes forward, there must be a demonstration of data right at the beginning, paying attention to results of minority students and those from low social, economic backgrounds.

Ohio ranked 39th in the country in 1990 and again in 2000 for the number of adults with college degrees. In Stark County, home to four colleges and with large universities within hours, about 18 percent of the adult population has a degree.

Portch said the study needs "an urgency to begin and patience for results."

U.S. Rep. Ralph Regula, a product of Stark County schools, said the message of the study ought to be brought to every American. Speaking as

a grandfather of four he added, "Their quality of life will be decided by us, not them."

According to Regula, we have to think in the long-term and that not only the Ohio Department of Education, but the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Economics and Defense have to be involved.

"Neither candidate," he said, "did a good job of articulating on education."

Regula said the federal government has funded education with \$60 billion. He indicated three missions: lower the dropout rate, reading programs, and a good teacher in every classroom.

Pounding the podium, he said, young students "gotta learn to read."

The panelists offered remarks, and audience members could speak to them at a luncheon following the program.

Patte Barth, a senior associate of the Education Trust in Washington, D.C., and reviewer of the study, said "The standards have not been set as high as they need to be to prepare students for college. All students at all levels gain more taking college courses at a higher level."

Jack Ewing, president of Mount Union College, endorsed the concept of using the ACT as an exit exam, telling whether a student is ready for college.

"Alignment is so important," he said. "It is our job together to identify what is important, necessary."

Tina Milano, CEO of Ohio College Access Network, indicated an advantage of using

ACT and its earlier tests would be that students would not be surprised at the end of high school about where they were or what they needed to do.

Guitele Nicoleau, director of research for the Public Education Network in Washington, D.C., and a reviewer of the study, praised the methodology of the study and the participation of multiple stakeholders.

She called the study "a very important piece of research."

James Smith with the Stark County Educational Service Center called for coordination, collaboration, careful monitoring and accurate marketing of success to the community.

Dianne Talarico, Superintendent of Canton City Schools, said, "It is time for us to take some courageous and bold steps."

Of students of poverty, minority doing well on the ACT and EPAS, "They can and they will if we believe."

She said the district needs to do everything it can to prepare them adequately, from early literacy programs to "aha moments." Give them the passport and they score, that's their ticket in.

The district will apply for a waiver from the OGT, she said.

Nancy Taylor, policy officer for the Knowledge Works Foundation, said "Education is about empowerment," and called for reducing arbitrary barriers and providing opportunities.

Don Reader, chairman of the Stark Education Partnership and retired judge, said, "This state has to change the way it does business if it's going to survive. Let's get with it."

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