



# *News Release*

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## **Two-Year Pilot Project Offers Free Tests to Help Schools Measure Career- and College-Readiness**

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**December 28, 2011**

LANSING – School districts in Michigan will be offered two free assessments to measure whether students are on track to being career- and college-ready, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) announced today.

As a result of several cost-saving measures in the management of its statewide assessments, MDE is able to fund a two-year pilot project to assist school districts in implementing portions of recently-enacted state legislation. This opportunity is voluntary and would be free to participating schools.

“Through efficiencies here at the Department of Education, we’re able to save local districts some money and deliver to them a way to connect academic growth for middle and high school students,” said state Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan.

This two-year pilot program will allow districts to administer the EXPLORE 8<sup>th</sup> grade assessment and the PLAN 10<sup>th</sup> grade assessment, at no cost to the districts. These “off-the-shelf” assessments fully align to the ACT college entrance exam component of the Michigan Merit Exam, and provide data that supports measuring student progress toward career- and college-readiness.

Because this is a voluntary pilot project and every district may not choose to participate, the results of these assessments cannot be used for federal or state accountability or ranking purposes. The ACT company will send the results directly to the school district for the schools’ use.

Flanagan acknowledged the efforts of Jim Ballard, the recently-retired Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, in supporting this project.

“Jim saw this as being an integral piece in measuring and monitoring students’ progress into and through high school,” Flanagan said. “He was a key leader in this effort, knowing how it will benefit principals, teachers, and students to be more successful.”

This is designed only as a two-year pilot project since MDE does not have a recurring, annual funding source for this specific purpose.

The goals of this project are two-fold. First, to relieve a financial burden, at least for two years, that many districts and ISDs have already taken on in order to get this type of information. Approximately 65 percent of Michigan's 8th and 10th grade students already participate in EXPLORE and/or PLAN tests at district or ISD expense.

Secondly, to provide the state and local districts with robust student-level data that can be used to inform the development of models for using academic growth in core academic subjects that districts may adopt in the future.

This pilot project will cover the costs in spring 2012 and 2013 for any Michigan school to voluntarily administer the selected measures of student achievement that are fully aligned to the ACT. MDE will be providing detailed instructions of how local districts can take advantage of this opportunity in early January.

This initiative will help support education reform efforts such as career- and college-ready cut scores; evaluations for educators, based in part on student academic growth; and implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

It will assist schools in meeting recent legislatively-mandated requirements by measuring student growth in core academic subjects. While adoption and implementation of these efforts is taking many forms in Michigan, student progress in core academic subjects is at the crux of determining if these initiatives are successful in improving student readiness for post-secondary experiences and closing achievement gaps.

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EXPLORE® typically is administered in 8th grade. This assessment is used by many districts to determine if their students are on track for career- and college-readiness; success on the ACT administered in 11th grade as part of the Michigan Merit Examination; and to assist in planning for what courses students will take as they enter into 9th grade. This assessment takes approximately two hours to administer and provides scores in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science.

PLAN® most often is given to students in the 10th grade, typically as a 'pre-ACT'. It provides valuable information on student progress towards career- and college-readiness, and administration of this assessment has been shown to predict student success on the ACT. The PLAN assessment takes around two hours to administer and yields scores in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science.

Both EXPLORE and PLAN, like the ACT, are built on a common score scale to promote validly measuring student growth. Also, ACT has set college readiness benchmark scores on EXPLORE and PLAN to help schools determine whether or not students are on track for success in post-secondary educational experiences. More information on EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT's College Readiness Standards & Benchmarks can be found at <http://www.act.org/k12/index.html>

There will be no changes to the MME, including the WorkKeys portion of that assessment, as a result of this pilot program.