

**House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education**  
**March 2, 2017**

Good morning, my name is John Clark, and I am a Lead State Strategist in the Government Relations unit of the Office of Public Affairs at ACT, Inc. ACT is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help people achieve education and workplace success.

I want to thank Chairman Cupp, and all the members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, for the opportunity to speak to you today about ACT's role in Ohio's grade 11 college and career readiness initiatives, as well as the return on investment that Ohio can expect from implementing ACT's assessments.

You may already know that the ACT test is the most taken and most used assessment for college admissions in the country. Nearly 2.1 million high school students who graduated in 2016—nearly two-thirds of all U.S. 2016 high school graduates—took the ACT test, a 73 percent increase compared to just a decade ago. During the same period, the number of African American students taking the ACT has nearly doubled, while the number of Hispanic test takers has nearly quadrupled.

Much of this growth can be attributed to state testing programs similar to the one that Ohio initiated this school year. In 2016–17, twenty states are offering the ACT (whether through statewide administration or local choice) to all of their 11th graders, at no cost to the students or their families. In providing this opportunity, Ohio is poised to receive the same benefits that other states have experienced from similar initiatives with the ACT: including an increase in college enrollment and ultimately graduation—especially among low-income and minority students and particularly among first-generation college students.

Recently, I came across a February 22 article in the *Dayton Daily News* that presented differing points of view on Ohio's statewide college readiness testing in grade 11. The opposition viewpoint (I'm paraphrasing) is that the ACT is not meant for all students, but instead just for the college bound, and that not everyone is going to college. But who decides whether a student is college bound in eleventh grade? Clearly, while not every student will go to college, *every* student should have the opportunity. Statewide testing with the ACT has been shown to equalize access to postsecondary education for all students, *especially for those who may not previously have been exposed to, or who may not have otherwise considered, college as an option.*

To underscore the benefits of testing all students with the ACT, Ohio's neighbor to the south provides a good example. More than 7,700 additional low-income students took the ACT in the first year of statewide ACT testing in Kentucky than the previous academic year—an increase of 83 percent, compared to a 43 percent increase for all students. More important, within the first four years of statewide testing in Kentucky, 7,100 more ACT-tested low-income students enrolled in postsecondary education than enrollment trends before statewide adoption of the ACT would have predicted.

ACT values its longstanding relationship with Ohio schools, and we were honored that, when given a choice, 90% of Ohio districts chose the ACT for their grade 11 students. We look

forward to providing secondary educators with our recent innovations, such as enhancements in reporting, designed to help inform curriculum and provide students, educators, and parents with information to pinpoint intervention strategies and promote college and career readiness.

In addition to being the most widely used assessment for postsecondary admissions, it is also worth mentioning that the ACT is the capstone assessment for the ACT Aspire system – the first longitudinal assessment system in English, reading, writing, math and science that connects student growth and progress from elementary grades through high school in the context of college and career readiness. ACT Aspire is based on an articulated and sequential progression of knowledge and skills, back-mapped to grade 3 from the non-negotiable skills assessed on the ACT test at grade 11 that ultimately connect to college and career readiness and success.

Used in combination with the ACT, ACT Aspire completes a cohesive and aligned assessment system that documents student progress toward ACT’s national college and career readiness benchmarks—something not currently possible with any other set of assessments. The complete ACT Aspire assessment system includes summative assessments that measure how much students have learned over time, as well as periodic classroom-based and interim assessments that help educators better understand students’ learning needs throughout the school year. Student assessment results will be tied to readiness benchmarks beginning in grade 3—early enough for schools to take appropriate and effective actions to address problems and help students improve.

ACT Aspire includes an interactive reporting system that provides deeper and richer insights into student performance, as well as access to additional resources and tools that are not possible with traditional reporting methods. The reports reflect the needs of educators, students, and parents as identified during the development process, and facilitate effective, early academic interventions with off-target students.

ACT’s College and Career Readiness Standards are strongly aligned to the Ohio Learning Standards, and the vast majority of Ohio students now take the ACT at grade 11. As current contracts expire and the state seeks maximum benefit for the cost and time required to assess students, ACT hopes to have the opportunity to demonstrate through an open RFP that ACT Aspire is the solution that provides the most coherent, longitudinal system of measurement that gives the greatest value for students in the state of Ohio.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention Ohio’s utilization of WorkKeys as a cornerstone of its Career and Technology Education programs and one requirement by which students can document workplace skills and earn a high school diploma. Successful completion of WorkKeys assessments in Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information lead to Ohio students earning the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), a portable credential earned by more than 3 million people across the United States. The NCRC verifies that an individual possesses the skills employers deem essential to workplace success, improving career outcomes for both job seekers and employers who use the credential to inform hiring, training, and promotion decisions.

Collectively, these three assessment programs provide a seamless longitudinal system of college and career readiness, with both the ACT and ACT Aspire (at grade 8-10) reporting a *Progress toward Career Readiness indicator*. The indicator predicts what level of the NCRC the student is likely to obtain, providing the student with prescriptive information as to their likely success to meet the requirement for one of the state's graduation assessment options. All students taking the ACT and ACT Aspire have insights into their career preparedness with critical information to inform preparation for post-high school plans.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.