

OFFICE OF CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER
Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items
September 15, 2016

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION

04. Information: ACT to meet federal assessment requirements [Goals 1 and 2 – MBE Strategic Plan]

The Offices of Research and Development and Academic Education will provide the State Board of Education with information related to:

- ACT design and purpose
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) assessment regulations

This item references Goals 1 and 2 of the *Mississippi Board of Education 2016-2020 Strategic Plan*.

Information Only

Back-up material attached

Report to the Mississippi State Board of Education

September 15, 2016

Question: Can ACT be used in lieu of state assessments in high school?

Background on ACT

The ACT test is administered statewide to all juniors and the results are now included into Mississippi's School and District Accountability System. The ACT is a norm-referenced assessment and provides overall scores ranging from 1 through 36. According to ACT:

The ACT aligns with the *ACT College and Career Readiness Standards*, which help students understand what their scores mean. Students can see how prepared they are for college by comparing their scores to the ACT College Readiness Benchmark scores.

The benchmarks, based on ACT test scores and actual college performance of students, are measures that show the likelihood of college success in a subject if students score at or above the benchmark. The benchmarks are: English (18), Reading / Social Science (22), Mathematics (22), and Science (23). Currently, only 11% of Mississippi students meet all four benchmarks. Reference: <http://www.act.org/content>

Federal Assessment Requirements

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (PL 114-95), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, states are required to administer high quality statewide tests in math, English-language arts (ELA) and science in grades 3-8. In high school, states must assess math and ELA at least once in grades 9 through 12 and science at least once between grades 10 and 12. All statewide assessments must be aligned with state academic standards.

ESSA does provide some flexibility in the types of assessments states may use. New provisions allow for the administration of a nationally recognized assessment in lieu of the state-determined academic assessments required for math, English language arts, and math. Specifically, the assessment must at a minimum:

- Be aligned with and address the breadth and depth of the State's academic standards;
- Provide coherent and timely information about student attainment of State academic standards at a student's grade level;
- Be equivalent in its content coverage, difficulty and quality as compared to the state's other assessments;
- Produce individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports regarding achievement on the assessments that allow parents, teachers,

principals, and other school leaders to understand and address the specific academic needs of students;

- Provide disaggregated results for the State, district, and school by each major racial and ethnic group; economically disadvantaged students compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged; children with disabilities compared to children without disabilities; English proficiency status; gender; migrant status; homeless children and youth; status as a child in foster care; and status as a student with a parent who is a member of the Armed Forces on active duty;
- Provide unbiased, rational, and consistent differentiation between and among schools in the state;
- Meet ESSA’s requirements for assessments as outlined in Section 1111 (b)(2), including technical criteria and accessibility, except the requirement that all students in a state take the same assessment; and
- Be approved through the federal peer review process as meeting all of the requirements.

Thomas Fordham Institute Study

In February 2016, the Fordham Institute released its evaluation of four standardized assessments – three multi-state assessments (PARCC, Smarter Balanced, and ACT Aspire) and a well-regarded existing state assessment (Massachusetts) to determine whether they met the criteria developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) for test quality. The analysis was designed to answer three key questions:

1. Do the assessments place strong emphasis on the most important content for college and career readiness as called for by the Common Core State Standards and other college and career ready standards? **(CONTENT)**
2. Do they require all students to demonstrate the range of thinking skills, including higher order skills called for by those standards? **(DEPTH)**
3. What are the overall strengths and weaknesses of each assessment relative to the examined criteria for ELA/ Literacy and mathematics? **(OVERALL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES)**

The CCSSO criteria address the “**content**” and “**depth**” of state tests in both English language arts and mathematics. For ELA, “**content**” spans topics such as whether students are required to use evidence from texts; for math, they are concerned with whether the assessments focus strongly on the content most needed for success in later mathematics. The “**depth**” criteria for both subjects include whether the tests required a range of “cognitively demanding,” high-quality items that make use of various item types (e.g., multiple choice, constructed response, etc.), among other things.

The Center for Assessment took these criteria and transformed them into a number of measurable elements that reviewers addressed. The panels essentially evaluated the extent of the match between the assessment and a key element of the CCSSO document. They assigned one of four ratings to each ELA and math-specific criterion, such that tests received one of four “match” ratings: **Excellent, Good, Limited/Uneven, or Weak Match**. To generate these marks, each panel reviewed the ratings from the grade 5 and grade 8 test forms, considered the results from the analysis of the program’s documentation (which preceded the item review), and came to consensus on the rating.

The report found that while ACT Aspire did well regarding the quality of items and the Depth of Knowledge assessed, the panelists found that the program did not adequately assess all of the priority content in both ELA/ Literacy and mathematics. Reference:
<https://edexcellence.net/publications/evaluating-the-content-and-quality-of-next-generation-assessments>

Considerations:

- ACT is not designed to measure the depth and content of Mississippi College and Career Ready standards.
- MDE would have to commission and fund an external, independent audit to determine the alignment of ACT with MS College and Career Ready Standards.
- MDE would be required to design and fund a review process and develop technical criteria to determine if a proposed assessment meets the ESSA assessment requirements outlined above.
 - If the state determines that ESSA requirements are met, the proposed assessment must still be approved through the USDE peer review process for assessments.
 - To date, no other state has been approved to use ACT as the single high school assessment through the ESSA federal peer review process.
- ACT results are not reported in the same manner as MS Assessment Results (i.e., five performance levels tied to accountability classifications, diagnostic reports, etc.).
- MS currently includes ACT as a:
 - Component within the Mississippi Accountability System
 - Graduation assessment option

Recommendation:

The MDE recommends maintaining the current Mississippi Assessment Program (MAP) that was approved by the State Board of Education April 16, 2015.