

Florida's Postsecondary Education Readiness Test

Summary

In October 2010, the Florida Department of Education's Division of Florida Colleges (Division) rolled out one of the first customized college placement tests developed from a blueprint created by a team of K-12, college, and university faculty. Florida's path to a customized placement test spans several years and is the result of a statewide movement toward a common definition of college readiness that coincided with the expiration of the state's contract for the prior placement exam. In 2008, working with the assistance of Achieve's American Diploma Project, Florida began working toward a common definition of college readiness that would include specific expectations of what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in their first college level English and math classes. During the same time period, the contract for the Accuplacer expired and had to be re-bid. The Division recognized the opportunity and released a Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) for a test that would reflect the definition of college readiness already under development. Thus, the groundwork for Florida's Postsecondary Education Readiness Test, or PERT, was laid.

Background

Students are considered college ready when they have the knowledge, skills, and academic preparation needed to enroll and succeed in introductory college level courses without the need for remediation in mathematics or English. Section 1008.30, Florida Statutes, which requires the State Board of Education to develop and implement a common placement testing program to determine the readiness of students who intend to enter a degree program at any public college or university. This policy has been implemented by the State Board of Education through Rule 6A-10.0315, F.A.C., since 1992.

Timeline and Activities

In February 2008, the Go Higher, Florida! Task Force (Task Force) released the Final Report to the State Board of Education, which resulted in the following five recommendations:

1. The State Board of Education, which oversees K-12 and the two-year public colleges and the Board of Governors, which oversees the public universities, should adopt of a common definition of "college and career readiness" for Florida.
2. Require all high school students to take rigorous and relevant courses that prepare them for life after graduation.
3. Develop/adopt high school/postsecondary assessment(s) which are clear in purpose and function, i.e., assessing skills in core courses for high school graduation and/or assessing postsecondary readiness in core courses.



4. Using FACTS.org and other media avenues, improve public awareness/understanding of current and future assessments, at all levels, their use as diagnostic tools, and the relationship between these assessments as measures of achievement and learning gains. Emphasize/promote system wide, cross-sector communication and participation.
5. State of Florida should join 30 other states in The American Diploma Project (ADP) initiative.

In April 2008, responding to the Task Force recommendations, Governor Charlie Crist, upon the recommendation of the Commissioner of Education, announced Florida's participation in Achieve's American Diploma Project Network. September 2008, as an initial step in aligning high school exit and college entry expectations, the Division of Florida Colleges organized a faculty workshop comprised of over 70 cross-sector English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics (math) faculty, including high school teachers, Florida college and state university faculty. Faculty broke out into subject areas and reviewed the American Diploma Project (ADP) benchmarks identifying those competencies they deemed critical to college readiness in math and English.

The process was facilitated by Florida's Statewide Course Numbering System, a statewide database of postsecondary courses that are determined by faculty to be similar in content. Courses designated by a common course number are guaranteed to transfer to any other postsecondary institution offering the same course, ensuring that the entry level college credit courses at all public postsecondary institutions in Florida are the same throughout the state. ENC 1101, Freshman Composition Skills I, and MAT 1033, Intermediate Algebra, were identified as the courses that best represented "the first credit bearing course" in each subject.

The faculty at the September workshop were asked to identify the ADP benchmarks that would prepare students for entry to ENC 1101 and MAT 1033. Faculty identified a subset of ADP benchmarks that are necessary for incoming students to be ready without the need for remediation. During the months of September and October 2008, surveys were sent to faculty and business and industry representatives to review the benchmarks. The process was heavily collaborative and inclusive with faculty ranking benchmarks in order of importance, business and industry providing input, and the Department's Division of Florida Colleges, Division of Public Schools, Division of Career and Adult Education, Office of Articulation (PreK-20) and the Office of the Board of Governors providing input and oversight. This truly cross-sector endeavor resulted in the identification of Florida's Postsecondary Readiness Competencies (PRCs).

Once finalized, the PRCs were aligned with the K-12 Sunshine State Standards through a cooperative effort between the Florida Department of Education (Department) and Achieve. The purpose was to identify any potential gaps and ensure that the K-12 curriculum addresses the competencies necessary for college readiness, as defined by postsecondary faculty.

Simultaneously, the Department began developing the Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) for a preferred pricing contract for the college placement test. The PRCs were the centerpiece of the ITN. Faculty convened in April 2009 to identify or develop exemplar test items for each PRC. Many of the same faculty involved in this process had previously been involved in the identification of Florida's Postsecondary Readiness Competencies. These experts chose items that covered the breadth and depth of each competency, ensuring that the items chosen were representative of the knowledge that incoming students should possess in order to be successful in entry-level college credit math and English courses without the need for remediation. The PRCs and exemplars were included in the ITN. The instructions for the content portion of the ITN directed vendors to submit sample test items that were aligned with the PRCs and the exemplars.

In addition to customization to Florida's definition of college readiness, the Department identified two other important requirements for the new placement test; affordability and availability diagnostic capabilities. For

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students who do not meet the state determined cut score, the assessment would need to be able to diagnose deficiencies on specific PRCs. An additional assessment capability was needed to measure students' mathematics proficiency at a level appropriate for placement into MAC 1105, College Algebra, the next course in the mathematics sequence after MAT 1033.

The Department received three proposals in response to the ITN and the proposal review consisted of three separate review committees – a Content Review Team, a Technical Review Team and a Negotiation Team. The Content Review Team was comprised of many of the same faculty who developed the exemplars. The Content Review Team was provided with the vendor's sample items and, using the rating criteria, reviewed the item alignment with the PRCs and item quality. After a rigorous review and a unanimous decision by the Negotiating Team, the notice of award was posted in January 2010, and McCann Associates (McCann) was selected as Florida's next preferred placement test vendor.

In April 2010, the Department moved to revise the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies to better align with the national Common Core State Standards. Florida Department of Education Commissioner, Dr. Eric Smith, publicly supported the efforts led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop a set of national K-12 standards. The Department engaged a core team of faculty to review the PRCs and the draft Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards. In addition, faculty reviewed the current skills included in Florida's Basic Skills Exit Test, the test administered to students at the end of the highest level of developmental education. In order to progress to college credit coursework in a given subject, students must meet local cut scores on the Basic Skills Exit Test. This work resulted in a revised set of PRCs which are a subset of the previously identified ADP benchmarks, draft Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards and Basic Skills Exit Test competencies. The revised PRCs were then used to begin test item development.

Once the test items were ready, they required pilot testing. In June 2010, Florida's colleges administered over 10,000 PERT pilot exams. The data from the pilot was then used to build the PERT item bank. The faculty team was re-convened in August 2010 in Tallahassee to review the entire item bank. The team analyzed each potential item for alignment with the PRCs and overall quality and made recommendations for adjustments.

Following the August faculty review, it was determined that there were not enough operational items approved by the faculty to launch a computer-adaptive test (CAT) in all three areas – reading, writing, and math. After considering a proposal from McCann, the Department decided to move forward with a linear test with 25 operational items and 5 field test items for reading and math while writing would start as a CAT. Once the number of administrations provides sufficient data, the field test items will be either removed from the bank or moved to the operational item pool. When the operational item pool is large enough to support CAT, McCann will seamlessly transition to computer-adaptive tests in mathematics and reading. Because of the critical role faculty played in PERT item development, the Department and McCann established an ongoing process to ensure faculty drive the development of new PERT items, thereby ensuring not only the quality of the items but increasing acceptance of the test by faculty and administrators.

The Department worked directly with McCann psychometricians to develop interim cut scores for placement into lower and upper developmental education, entry-level college credit, and MAC 1105. The strategy for interim cut scores was to place students into these courses in similar proportions to the current placement rate to avoid dramatic changes in course enrollment and faculty assignments. Each college is expected to use the interim cut scores for placement purposes until the Department has enough PERT performance and course outcome data to set final cut scores in State Board rule. It is anticipated that it will take close to a year to obtain the necessary data.

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The Department is now working with the colleges to restructure the developmental education course sequence. The goal is to align course numbers and establish equivalent courses statewide. By standardizing the course numbers across colleges, the Department will be able to effectively establish statewide cut scores for lower and upper developmental education courses. Without such standardization, common cut scores below entry-level college credit would not be possible.

October 25, 2010 the PERT went live. During the initial rollout phase, faculty at each college will be given the opportunity to take the PERT in a proctored setting. Each college is now in the process of transitioning from the Accuplacer to the PERT. By the end of spring 2011, every college in Florida is expected to use the PERT as their primary placement tool. Also in early 2011, it is anticipated that the diagnostic capabilities of the PERT system will be ready and colleges will have the ability to identify specific competencies students need to master in order to be ready for college level coursework. This will enable colleges to tailor instruction and reduce the time needed for remediation while enhancing the probability of success.

In the coming year, the Division of Florida Colleges and the Division of Public Schools will explore the feasibility of authorizing high schools to administer the PERT. While the high schools are well on their way to developing the capacity to administer computer-based tests to each student, procedures will need to be developed to ensure that the same standards for test security and administration adhered to by the colleges are in place for high schools. In addition, the Department and McCann are working with the US Department of Education to determine the process for the PERT to become authorized as an ability-to-benefit assessment for federal financial aid eligibility purposes.



Appendix A:

A Guide to Developing a Customized Placement Test

For states interested in customizing placement assessments, consider the following step-by-step guide to assist with the process.

1. Develop a core team of cross-sector state level administrators to coordinate the activities.
2. Identify a cross-sector team of faculty that are willing and able to participate in an ongoing effort for two or more years.
3. Have faculty identify competencies and expectations for developmental courses through the first level of college credit courses. Note: ADP and Common Core (and others) may be used as references but faculty should not be constrained. Allow faculty to develop their own competencies that match their expectations of entering students.
4. Have faculty rank the competencies in order of importance. For example, in mathematics, quadratic equations may be more important than rational expressions although both skills are expected. This is necessary because with the limited number of items on a test, not every competency can be fully measured.
5. The state level core team determines the number of items preferred on the test. It is also important to determine whether a linear or computer-adaptive test is desired. A computer-adaptive test can be shorter but requires more total items in the test bank.
6. Once the length of the test is determined, the state level core team selects the number of items that will be used to measure each competency. For highly ranked competencies, a larger number of items will be used and the reverse for lower ranked competencies. This will produce a test blueprint that specifies the number of items for each competency that will appear on the test.
7. Develop the item pools based on the test blueprint. This can be done directly by the vendor or collaboratively between the vendor and the faculty team.
8. After the item pools are developed, allow faculty an opportunity to review the quality and align each item with a competency. Allow faculty to recommend revisions and remove items that faculty do not approve.
9. Once the item pool is approved and aligned by faculty, administer a pilot to students that are similar demographically and academically to those who would normally be tested. Analyze pilot results and remove items that did not perform well and then construct the test.
10. Select the criteria for determining the interim cut scores. If the goal is to match the current placement rates, the state level core team can report current course enrollment in developmental education, entry level and beyond entry level. If the goal is different, the state level core team will need to develop alternative criteria.
11. Select interim cut scores based on the criteria and the expected distribution of the test.
12. Launch placement assessment.
13. Assess course outcomes and reevaluate the interim cut scores.



Appendix B:

Faculty Participation

The Division of Florida Colleges would like to formally thank the many faculty who dedicated their time and energies to making the PERT a reality. Over 100 faculty from five school districts, two non-public postsecondary institutions, nine universities and 24 colleges participated in this process. *Our apologies if faculty participants do not appear on the list. Please contact Ms. Julie Alexander at julie.alexander@fldoe.org so that we can update our records.*

First Name	Last Name	Institution
Gerardo	Aladro	Florida International University
Aimee	Alexander-Shea	Hillsborough Community College
Rosany	Alvarez	Miami Dade College
Loretta	Atherton	Florida College
Jenny	Balsamo	Florida State College at Jacksonville
Nick	Bekas	Valencia Community College
Henri	Benlolo	College of Central Florida
Mark	Billiris	St. Petersburg College
Loretta	Blanchette	Miami Dade College
Nedra	Blum	Florida College System
Steve	Blumsack	Florida State University
Efrain	Bonilla	North Florida Community College
Amy	Bosley	Valencia Community College
Nataliya	Brant	Florida State College at Jacksonville
Elizabeth	Brown	Hillsborough County
Gail	Burkett	Palm Beach State College
Anna	Butler	Polk State College
Janette	Campbell	Palm Beach State College
Charles	Carroll	Florida Gateway College
Kathleen	Ciez-Volz	Florida State College at Jacksonville
Bob	Connelly	Santa Fe College
Gayle	Cowley	Escambia County
Marilyn	Curall	Valencia Community College
Linda	Davis	Keiser University
Mark	Dicks	Santa Fe College

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First Name	Last Name	Institution
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Karen	Eisenhauer	Brevard Community College
Heather	Elko	Brevard Community College
Julia	Erben	Gulf Coast Community College
Sharon	Erle	North Florida Community College
Diane	Fettrow	Broward County
Meribeth	Fields	College of Central Florida
Deborah	Fontaine	Northwest Florida State College
Debbie	Garrison	Valencia Community College
Richard	Gaspar	Hillsborough Community College
Laura	Girtman	Tallahassee Community College
Albert	Groccia	Valencia Community College
Judy	Haisten	College of Central Florida
Patricia	Hare	Florida College System
Annetta	Hastings	Florida College
Carol	Hawkins	Seminole State College
Robert	Hervey	Hillsborough Community College
Greg	Hlad	Pasco-Hernando Community College
Scott	Hochwald	University of North Florida
Teresa	Hodge	Broward College
Fran	Hopf	University of South Florida
Carol	Hulse	University of West Florida
Michael	Jamieson	College of Central Florida
Sasha	Jarrell	Northwest Florida State College
Trish	Joyce	Broward College
Moana	Karsteter	Tallahassee Community College
Susan	Kellicut	Seminole State College
Julie	Kelly	St. Johns River Community College
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Shiela	Kerr	Florida State College at Jacksonville
Thom	Kieft	Lake-Sumter Community College
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Jean	Larson	University of Florida
Jo Ann	Lewin	Edison State College
Charles	Lindsey	Florida Gulf Coast University
Bonnie	Littlefield	North Florida Community College
Martha	Marinara	University of Central Florida
Angelique	Medvesky	State College of Florida
Linda	Moore	University of West Florida
Tammy	Muhs	University of Central Florida
David-Paul	Nezelek	State College of Florida
Dywayne	Nicely	Indian River State College
Judy	Nolasco	Hillsborough Community College
Giray	Okten	Florida State University
Donald	Ransford	Edison State College
Kenneth	Ray	Hillsborough Community College
Traci	Reed	St. Johns River Community College
Amoy	Reid	Broward College
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Carrie	Rodesiler	Florida Gateway College
Marina	Rodriguez	Miami Dade College
Laura	Runge	University of South Florida
Karin	Russell	Keiser University
Robert	Saba	Florida International University
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Laurel	Severino	Santa Fe College
Carmen	Simpson	St. Petersburg College
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Barbara	Sloan	Tallahassee Community College
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Michael	Vensel	Miami Dade College
Lane	Vosbury	Seminole State College
Kaye	Walter	Valencia Community College
Florence	Williams	Palm Beach State College
Dee Ann	Wilson	Lake County
Lynda	Wolverton	Polk State College
Alice	Wong	Miami Dade College

Special recognition goes to the faculty in bold who have dedicated significant time to PERT development throughout the process.

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