

**ACT Testimony
Montana State Legislature
Friday, January 28, 2005
Presented on this date by Asheley Peterson**

Thank you, Madame Chair and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Asheley Peterson and it is my pleasure to provide information regarding the ACT Assessment and the role it plays in improving both college readiness and in contributing to a bright economic forecast that is currently under consideration in the Big Sky state of Montana. I hope this information will provide you some background and insight into the statewide experience of an ACT test and what you might expect if adopted through HB 369.

Before I begin I would like to briefly share my professional experience. My background in education began a dozen years ago as director of a satellite community college serving five rural mountain counties in Colorado. My role was to deliver all services including admission, enrollment, and course placement for a full two-year degree program, albeit in places where elk outnumber people and stoplights come along at the pace of every hundred miles or so. I know first-hand the challenges for students who aspire to earn a degree in places where geography can be one of the biggest challenges of all. I joined ACT in 1998 and am currently the Director of ACT's 16-state West Region. I have frontline responsibility for Colorado's statewide ACT testing program and will share successful outcomes from this and other state testing models emerging from across the country.

Your committee and this legislation position Montana well in the context of national and global trends in education. President Bush has placed the re-design of American high schools in the #1 position on his education agenda and the investment in high school transition programs such as proposed in HB 369 will secure the high-quality workforce that Montana - and the world - will require of this and future generations. Several other states, like North Dakota, are considering similar legislation in addition to those that currently offer statewide testing like Colorado, Illinois, Tennessee and Oklahoma.

My purpose here today is to answer Montana's most pressing questions surrounding the ACT, so here is your top ten list of questions and brief answers to share:

1. WHAT IS THE ACT?

The ACT Assessment is a curriculum-based achievement, college admissions examination designed to provide meaningful academic, career planning, and scholarship information for students and for the educators they serve. The test is developed as a result of the only National Curriculum Survey, conducted every 2-3 years, which reviews all state standards and content required for success in college freshman-level courses. The test consists of 4 multiple subject matter tests: English, math, reading and science. Scores are reported in both norm and criterion-referenced formats and follow a score scale of 1-36. ACT posts the test blueprint, or "Standards for Transition" so that educators can document the alignment between state standards and college readiness standards.

Nationally, over 1.3 million high school graduates take the ACT which is accepted at thousands of colleges across the country, including the Ivy Leagues. Here in Montana, the ACT is also accepted at all colleges and universities. Your Class of 2004 tested 6,255 high school graduates who presented a collective composite score of 21.7, just above the national average.

2. **What states require the ACT, and how are they using the tests and results?**

The states of Colorado and Illinois have required the ACT for all high school juniors since 2000, and the Michigan legislature just passed similar legislation. The results are used with four purposes in mind: 1) to open access to college for all students; 2) to better articulate high school, college, and workforce standards; 3) to boost college enrollment; and 4) to reduce remediation. Results in Colorado and Illinois were nothing less than astonishing. Both states experienced boosts in college enrollment near 34% and admission was more evenly distributed across all groups of students and colleges. Low income and minority students represented the greatest increases, with the most dramatic increase among Native American students. High schools use the test results for diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in core curriculum and to counsel students into core courses that lead to success in college. Both states have dispelled the myths surrounding students who typically did not go on to college: scores took only a small dip when moving to all student-testing, and last year, BOTH states experienced an actual INCREASE in scores, moving from a composite of 20.1 to 20.3!

Illinois:

- Included in the increased college enrollments in 2002 were 15 percent of the ACT-tested students who said they did not intend to go to college when they took the PSAT as high school juniors.
- The number of in-state, ACT-tested fall freshmen enrolled in Illinois colleges in 2002 (the first graduating class affected by PSAT testing) was up by 24 percent compared to the previous year.
- The number of these college freshmen from families earning \$30,000 per year or less was up by 8 percent compared to 2001.

Colorado:

- Prior to statewide testing, 64% of graduates took the ACT voluntarily, now 99%. Currently Montana tests 56% of graduates through self-selection and would see an increase, though not as dramatic as Colorado, should statewide testing be offered to students on a voluntary basis.
- Annual last-minute "surge" in enrollments - students who didn't have a plan!
- Teachers now teaching to standards, not "to the test"
- 99% annual participation rate - students are motivated to do well!

3. **What states are using vouchers or other means to make the ACT available to students on a voluntary basis through schools or districts, with the state paying the cost?**

Tennessee and Oklahoma each offer the ACT to students on a voluntary basis with the state paying the fees. In 1993, the Oklahoma State Board of Regents was concerned with the low college-going rates, especially for underrepresented groups of students and needed

a way to reduce remediation costs. They worked with the legislature to offer testing on a voluntary basis which has increased enrollment by 25%. In addition:

Oklahoma:

- Oklahoma increased the proportion of public school graduates who are college-ready
- Oklahoma's largest minority group is American Indian and the proportion of American Indian public school graduates taking the ACT *increased* two percentage points from 1993 to 2003 AND their average ACT Composite score *increased*
- The number of Native American students who took rigorous core courses in high school jumped from 38% to 46%

4. Does ACT meet the NCLB requirements?

Yes. The ACT includes all requirements as outlined by NCLB including norm and criterion-referencing, scientifically-based research, valid and reliable practices for fairness, protection of student privacy, disaggregated reporting, diagnostic and prescriptive data, student-through-state level reporting, and preparation for college.

5. What is the positive impact that using the ACT has with community colleges, technical schools, as well as four year colleges and universities?

The data shows that benefits of statewide testing extend to both four and two-year colleges. Specifically, community colleges use ACT scores for course placement which contributes to student success by properly advising students in their college programs. Workforce training programs in community colleges use ACT scores inform potential employers about a student's ability to read, write, and solve math problems - all important skills in college AND the in the workplace. Employment projections for the future are clear: our students will seek further training beyond high school for the jobs of tomorrow. Four year college benefits are currently under research as the first co-hort of mandatory tested students approaches their graduation from college in June 2005.

6. How can the ACT replace the need for placement tests?

ACT has provided course placement services to colleges for decades using ACT scores for proper course placement.

7. What is the expected added-value of ACT in economic terms?

The state of Oklahoma has conducted a return on investment study which documents that for every \$1.00 spent on the ACT, a \$6.00 gain has been realized by measuring the reduction in the number of students needing college remediation.

8. What is the impact of paying for the ACT in states where it is not mandated?

By sending the message that college and workforce readiness is important enough that a state is willing to invest, those states that offer voluntary ACT testing have met college admission and retention goals similar to, though not as high in terms of percentage increase, as those states which have mandated testing.

9. How does the ACT support P-16 alignment?

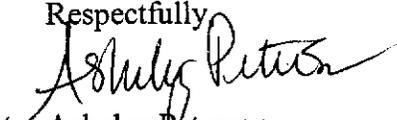
ACT standards are closely matched to state standards, though they go beyond to highlight the gaps between what is expected to be ready for college and work. ACT standards provide a common language for educators, students, parents, and employers to know what a student can do with what they know. The ACT provides a systemic way to help students be recruited for college scholarships and admission and helps parents and teachers in the process of helping support students in their transition from high school to college.

10. What is current level of college readiness for Montana students?

Although Montana's 2004 graduates scored above the national average on the ACT, their scores show that only 27% have met the minimum benchmark to be ready for college success in courses like English Composition, College Biology, and College Algebra I. Similar statistics across the country show there is still work to be done.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share this important information with you today and offer ACT's support of Montana's initiatives to help more students be better prepared to contribute in meaningful ways to the state's educational and economic success.

Respectfully



Asheley Peterson