



March

WorkKeys

Next month, all juniors will be taking the Michigan Merit Exam. This exam consists of 3 different tests: 1) the SAT college entrance exam (explained in detail in this past November's newsletter), 2) State of Michigan developed tests in science and social studies called the M-Step, 3) the WorkKeys job skills assessment. Here is some more information about the WorkKeys test and why it is important.

What is the WorkKeys test?

WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system measuring real-world skills. WorkKeys can allow for correct identification of students who have the basic skills required to be successful in a given position or career. Students will be tested in three subject areas – Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information.

- **Applied Mathematics** - According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 80% of the fastest-growing jobs in the United States require some training after high school (Please note: “training after high school” does not mean 4 years of college. It can be on the job training, a 1 year certificate program, or 2 year associates degree, among other things). Many of these jobs require a strong basis in math and science. Mathematics engages critical thinking, abstract reasoning, and problem solving. Individuals can use these skills throughout their lifetime for higher learning and many different careers. The WorkKeys Applied Mathematics assessment helps current and potential employees measure the math skills they have against those the workplace requires. This assessment measures the skills people use when they apply mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques to work-related problems. The test questions require the examinee to set up and solve the types of problems and do the types of calculations that actually occur in the workplace. This test is designed to be taken with a calculator. A formula sheet that includes all formulas required for the assessment is provided. While individuals may use calculators and conversion tables to help with the problems, they still need to use math skills to think them through.
- **Reading for Information** - Business and employees face rising requirements for reading and math skills in today's workplaces. An American Management Association survey of mid-sized and larger businesses found that 38% of job applicants taking employer-administered tests lacked the reading and math skills needed in the jobs for which they applied. Reading assessments need to focus on written materials that are used by employees in the workplace. The WorkKeys Reading for Information test measures the skills people use when they read and use written text in order to do a job. The written texts include memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations. It is often the case that workplace communications are not necessarily well-written or targeted to the appropriate audience. Reading for Information materials do not include information that is presented graphically, such as in charts, forms, or blueprints.
- **Locating Information** - A recent survey found that 22.1% of hourly employees had an inability to read and translate drawings, diagrams, and flowcharts. Locating information has added a fourth "R"—retrieval skills—to the original 3Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The skill people use when they locate, synthesize, and use information from workplace graphics such as charts, graphs, tables, forms, flowcharts, diagrams, floor plans, maps, and instrument gauges is a basic skill required in today's workforce. The WorkKeys Locating Information test measures the skills people use when they work with workplace graphics. Examinees are asked to find information in a graphic or insert information into a graphic. They also must compare, summarize, and analyze information found in related graphics.

Scores on each subject area test range from 3 (least complex) to 7 (most complex).

Why is WorkKeys important?

In many places throughout the United States, employers find that students are not adequately trained, even for entry-level jobs. WorkKeys helps businesses and educators work together to ensure that you leave school prepared for real jobs in the real world.

How does the system work?

WorkKeys helps students figure out how prepared they are for jobs that interest them and guide them to the education and training needed. The system documents work skills in key areas, giving students an edge with employers when applying for jobs.

So are these tests designed for only blue-collar jobs?

No. WorkKeys has determined the job skills needed for more than 20,000 unique job titles, ranging from accountant to automotive technician, and from welder to webmaster. In fact, the fastest growing types of WorkKeys job profiles are being done for professional, technical, and managerial jobs that require at least a bachelor's degree. The abilities to learn, listen, communicate, work in teams, and solve problems – all areas addressed by WorkKeys – are important assets for any employee, regardless of career choice.

What happens to the test results?

Students can use their WorkKeys results to get a better picture of jobs they are ready for and to improve areas where skills are weak. Employers can use the results to determine how qualified students are for positions in their organizations. Upon completion of the three WorkKeys tests, students may qualify for a National Career Readiness Certificate, depending on their WorkKeys scores.

This portable credential verifies to employers anywhere in the United States that an individual has essential core employability skills in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. These three skills are highly important to the majority of jobs in the workplace. The certificate offers individuals, employers, and educators an easily understood and universally valued credential that certifies the attainment of these workplace skills.

Career Readiness Certificate Skill Levels

WorkKeys has generated a database with occupational profiles for thousands of jobs across the country. A majority of the jobs require certain skill levels in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. Individuals with higher skill levels qualify for more jobs. The National Career Readiness Certificate uses test results from these assessments to award certificates in four categories:

- **Bronze** Level signifies an individual has scored at least a level 3 in each of the three core areas (Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information) and has the necessary skills for 16 percent of the jobs in the ACT JobPro Database.
- **Silver** Level signifies an individual has scored at least a level 4 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary skills for 67 percent of the jobs in the ACT JobPro Database.
- **Gold** Level signifies an individual has scored at least a level 5 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary skills for 93 percent of the jobs in the ACT JobPro Database.
- **Platinum** Level signifies an individual has scored at least a level 6 in each of the three core areas and has the necessary skills for 99 percent of the jobs in the ACT JobPro Database.

Why do individuals need a career readiness certificate?

The certificate is designed to complement other traditional credentials, such as a high school diploma or college degree. While these education credentials mark the fulfillment of an individual's classroom learning experiences, the certificate confirms the person's competence in a specific set of workplace skills. This gives the job seeker an advantage when applying for jobs, a complement to a diploma and resume. For employees already on the job, a certificate can demonstrate skills needed for a promotion or for training that leads to greater productivity and effectiveness.

More information about the WorkKeys system can be found at <http://www.act.org/workkeys>.