

**To:** Alan Burrow, MDE Director, District and School Performance  
Cody Shumaker, MDE Director of Accountability Services

**From:** Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellows

**RE:** ACT WorkKeys Adoption



Dr. Burrow,

Teach Plus is a national nonprofit that empowers teachers to lead improvements in educational policy and practice. Through its Policy Fellowship, Teach Plus Mississippi trains highly-effective teachers across the state in policy, advocacy, communications, and research in order to shape policies that improve equity and opportunities for students. As Policy Fellows and classroom teachers, we're deeply committed to ensuring success for every student in Mississippi.

The State Board of Education's move to adopt ACT WorkKeys (hereafter "WorkKeys") as a measure of career readiness signals the embrace of a "both/and" approach to college and career readiness. We recognize the positive step of measuring career readiness, just as we measure college readiness through the ACT. We also recognize the State Board's move to allow WorkKeys *Silver (with CTE requirement)*, *Gold*, and *Platinum* scores to be counted in the College- and Career-Readiness (CCR) component of the State Accountability Model. Fulfilling the limitless potential of Mississippi's children requires us to give all students meaningful access to all college and career pathways.

We recommend the following action steps related to the adoption of the ACT WorkKeys Assessment:

### **1. Approve the State Board's proposal regarding the inclusion of ACT WorkKeys in the CCR component of the Accountability Model.**

Early discussions regarding the inclusion of ACT WorkKeys raised concerns about how the assessment would be administered at the local level. Chief among those concerns was the prospect that schools would have a perverse incentive to push more students towards WorkKeys instead of doing more to prepare students for the more rigorous ACT. Such a move would've prioritized accountability points at the expense of the postsecondary needs of students, particularly students of color.

The current policy recommendation, which allows ACT WorkKeys to be included in the CCR component at *Silver (with CTE requirement)*, *Gold*, or *Platinum* score addresses our most pressing concern which is why we're recommending the approval of the proposal.

### **2. Require the Mississippi Department of Education to collect critical data during the implementation of ACT WorkKeys.**

Collecting data during the implementation of ACT WorkKeys will maximize the assessment's effect on student achievement. We recommend the Department of Education to collect the following data in order to get the most out of the WorkKeys assessment:



- + **WorkKeys Performance by CTE Program:** This data will allow the Department of Education to identify which districts have robust CTE programs with high-performing WorkKeys. This data set will also help districts compare their performance with other districts in the state.
- + **Geographic Information:** Students who have earned the National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC) would appeal to career training programs and industries. Knowing which regions of the state have certified students will give potential employers information to know where to recruit workers or where to open new businesses.
- + **WorkKeys Performance by Career Pathway Program, Race/Ethnicity, and Income Level:** Having racial and socioeconomic data of CTE students will help the Department of Education ensure that all students have equitable access to CTE opportunities.
- + **Career Information for WorkKeys Test Takers:** Surveying students who take the WorkKeys assessment about their future plans will give districts insight into what supports they can provide for their students.
- + **Records of Districts with Anti-Discrimination Policies in Place for CTE Placement:** Some districts have guiding policies in place to ensure that there is no discrimination during CTE placements. We want to ensure that all school districts have policies in place that ensure that all students have access to all CTE programs, especially those leading to the most lucrative careers in the region.

In addition to these recommendations, we encourage state policymakers to explore strategies to take the financial burden of administering ACT WorkKeys off school districts. We encourage the state to explore opportunities for economic development groups or private industry to partner with school districts to cover the costs of the career-readiness assessment.

#### **Mississippi educators and Teach Plus Policy Fellows:**

Syreata Brassell, Quitman County Middle School

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