FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Communications
334-242-9950
comm@alsde.edu

ALABAMA FIRST STATE IN AMERICA TO OFFER FULL ACT SUITE OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READY ALIGNED ASSESSMENTS
State Superintendent calls the Move a “Game Changer” for Meaningful and Balanced Student Assessment

Montgomery, Ala. – The Alabama State Board of Education’s continued leadership in academics and student assessments places Alabama as the first state in America to fully adopt the ACT suite of student assessments; starting with ACT Aspire, which begins testing on April 28, 2014. In 2013, the State Board of Education voted to incorporate the ACT Aspire assessment into PLAN 2020 for testing in Grades 3-8.

While our previous tests served a purpose during its time, State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice said the level of detail and information available from the full suite of ACT assessments will allow educators, parents and students to use the data to better inform instruction and prepare students for college and career readiness. The new assessment system consists of ACT Aspire (Grades 3-8), ACT Explore (Grade 8), ACT Plan (Grade 10), ACT Quality Core (English 10 and Algebra I), ACT plus Writing (Grade 11, now offered to all 11th graders free of charge) and ACT WorkKeys (Grade 12, starting Spring 2015).

ACT Aspire offers educators and parents an opportunity for customized instruction and detailed reports on student growth from Grades 3 through 12. Previously, student assessments were fragmented, independent of one another, and success in one assessment was not a strong indicator of how a student would perform in the next assessment. The new ACT suite of aligned assessments report where a student is currently, informs parents of what that means, and gives educators, parents and students, instruction on what to do next to ensure academic success.

“Like never before, teachers will be able to measure students’ mastery of the standards taught, plan intervention and acceleration, and create individualized instruction for students,” said Deputy State Superintendent of Education Sherrill Parris. “Parents, students, and teachers will know by the end of third grade whether each student is on track to be successful upon graduation from high school. This is crucial in terms of individualized instruction, intervention planning, guidance for course selection, career counseling, and college advising.”

The new assessments also allow for greater flexibility in scheduling for school administrators and, unlike the previous assessments that could take up to five days to administer, Bice said the new assessments can be administered in four hours – and not all at one time. “The four hours needed can be spread out, depending on the assessment that is being administered, so this greatly reduces the amount of time needed for testing at the local level,” Parris said.

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Bice said the new system “redefines” what assessment is and what it means in Alabama. “We’re changing directions about how we use student assessment in this state. It’s about “how did I or we do, what does that mean, and what do we do next?” That is the process of teaching and learning.” Bice said. “There is nothing in these reports about “what list do I go on to, or how did I get ranked?”

Bice stressed that the initial results from the new assessments will become the baseline and will not be used for unintended purposes including teacher evaluations; rather the first year’s assessments will be used exclusively for the purpose of informing instruction.

In addition, school systems (by school or within a school) can administer these assessments in a computer-based format or in a traditional paper and pencil format. There is no difference in a school’s ability to take either assessment based on its technological infrastructure. Bice said the new testing system from ACT will allow Alabama teachers the ability to measure critical areas within a subject; in order to offer students additional assistance with subject areas or identify areas in which a student needs to be challenged more.

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) vision of “Every Child a Graduate - Every Graduate Prepared” is the goal of PLAN 2020, the Alabama State Board of Education’s plan for the future of education in our state. In PLAN 2020, the growth of “Learners,” (students), will be assessed by a balanced and meaningful system that informs parents and students, while assisting teachers with strategic instructional plans to ensure every child graduates and that they graduate prepared. This is what the full suite of ACT products provides.

For more information, please contact Communications at comm@alsde.edu or 334-242-9950.

Definitions:

ACT Aspire is an assessment system that measures academic achievement in English, math, reading, science, and writing in Grades 3 through 10. ACT Aspire is linked to the ACT College- and Career-Readiness Standards, research-based information that makes test results meaningful by connecting a student’s ACT Aspire score to specific skills and knowledge important for college and work success.

ACT Explore is a curriculum-based educational and career planning program for 8th and 9th graders that measures achievement in English, math, reading, and science. The assessment is based on the major areas of high school and postsecondary instructional programs and measures the skills and knowledge needed for college success. Additionally, ACT Explore includes a career exploration component that stimulates students’ thinking about future plans and relates personal characteristics to career options.
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**ACT Plan** is a curriculum-based educational and career planning program for 10th graders that measures achievement in English, math, reading, and science. ACT Plan helps students build a solid foundation for future academic and career success and provides information needed to address school districts’ high-priority issues. It is a comprehensive guidance resource that helps students measure their current academic development, explore career/training options, and make plans for the remaining years of high school and post-graduation years. ACT Plan is also an excellent way to prepare for the ACT – one of the best indicators of readiness for college.

**ACT QualityCore** is a research-based system designed to help schools better prepare all students for college and workforce training. The system includes educator's resources, formative items and end of course assessments to help students stay on track in English and Algebra. QualityCore also ensures that high school core courses are focused on the most essential postsecondary skills and enables educators to monitor progress toward, and attainment of, those skills.

**The ACT® Plus Writing** college readiness assessment contains five curriculum- and standards-based assessments: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and a Writing Test. The assessment is used as a college admissions and placement test and measures the skills and knowledge needed for first-year college success. Additionally, the ACT includes a career exploration component that stimulates students’ thinking about future plans and relates personal characteristics to career options.

**ACT WorkKeys** is a job skills assessment system that helps employers select, hire, train, develop, and retain a high-performance workforce. This series of tests measures foundational and soft skills and offers specialized assessments to target institutional needs. As part of ACT’s Work Readiness System, ACT WorkKeys has helped millions of people in high schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, and government agencies build their skills to increase global competitiveness and develop successful career pathways.

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ACT Plus Writing
The ACT® college readiness assessment contains five curriculum- and standards-based assessments: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and an optional Writing Test. The assessment is used as a college admissions and placement test and measures the skills and knowledge needed for first-year college success. Additionally, the ACT includes a career exploration component that stimulates students thinking about future plans and relates personal characteristics to career options.

ACT QualityCore
ACT QualityCore is a research-based system of educator's resources, formative items and end of course assessments designed to help schools better prepare all students for college and workforce training. It ensures that high school core courses are focused on the most essential postsecondary skills and enables educators to monitor progress toward, and attainment of, those skills.

ACT Plan*
ACT Plan is a curriculum-based educational and career planning program for 10th graders that measures achievement in English, math, reading, and science. ACT Plan helps students build a solid foundation for future academic and career success and provides information needed to address school districts' high-priority issues. It is a comprehensive guidance resource that helps students measure their current academic development and make plans for the remaining years of high school and post-graduation years.

ACT Explore*
ACT Explore is a curriculum-based educational and career planning program for 8th and 9th graders that measures achievement in English, math, reading, science, and writing in grades 3 through 10. ACT Explore is linked to the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards, research-based information that makes test results meaningful by connecting a student's ACT Aspire score to specific skills and knowledge important for college and work success.

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*With the transition into ACT Aspire, the last administration of ACT Explore and ACT Plan for Grades 8 and 10 will be October 2014.