

Wisconsin plan would have all high school students take ACT

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All high school students in Wisconsin would take the ACT college entrance exam during their junior year under a proposal announced Wednesday by the state Department of Public Instruction.

The ACT would replace the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination starting in the 2014 school year, under the plan state Superintendent Tony Evers unveiled at a news conference in Pewaukee. The plan would have to be approved by the Legislature and Gov. Scott Walker before taking effect.

All 11th-grade students would take the ACT, as well as another test designed to assess job skills called WorkKeys. Students in elementary grades would take a new test replacing the WKCE, which is being designed by a 28-state consortium that includes Wisconsin.

Instead of students being on the hook to pay the ACT's \$50 cost, the state would pick up the tab. The plan also calls for students in ninth and 10th grades to take ACT pre-tests to help determine what they know, where they need to improve and to prepare them for the college entrance exam in 11th grade.

The numerous tests will meet the demand for accountability that matters and provide multiple measures of how a student and a school are performing, Evers said in prepared statements.

It also makes sense to replace the WKCE with the ACT, since students would then be able to take one exam that would meet both state and federal testing requirements while providing them with a college admissions score, Evers said.

Last year, 61 percent of Wisconsin's public school students took the ACT. There are 10 other states that require the ACT be taken to meet state testing requirements. They are Illinois, Colorado, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Utah and Wyoming.

Evers said administering the variety of tests will help strengthen the link between high schools, technical colleges and universities because there will be better guidance for students as they choose their path.

Having students take a test that will affect their college admissions gives them an incentive that other state- and federal-required exams do not, said Ed Colby, spokesman for the ACT.

Other benefits are that students don't have to pay the fee, states get more information to help them guide their curriculum and some students who weren't planning to take the test or go to college may change their plans, Colby said.

Requiring the ACT test to be taken would require a law change and would cost about \$7 million over the next two years.

Walker spokesman Cullen Werwie issued a noncommittal statement, thanking Evers for the idea and saying it will be considered along with other budget requests as the governor puts together his two-year spending plan. Walker's budget proposal, which will incorporate requests from DPI and state agencies, will be released to the Legislature early next year and likely voted on sometime next summer.

Rep. Robin Vos, one of the co-chairs of the Legislature's budget-writing committee, said it sounds like the proposal has merit. "But I would want to ensure that the test we're offering is useful to all students," Vos said. "It sounds like it is, but I haven't seen all of the details."