

# **EXPLORE Pilot**

**Evaluation Report, 2000-2001**

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by teachers. The 2001 administration cost \$22,881. This included purchase of study guides for teachers and of 990 new test booklets to replace booklets that were lost or destroyed.

Prior to the adoption of EXPLORE, AISD staff did not use a single instrument that yielded both achievement and career-related data. However, both types of data were gathered and used in the district. In addition to the TAAS and TPRI, to measure student achievement, AISD officials administer the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades 5 and 8. The ITBS is a nationally normed achievement test with subtests in English, Math, Reading, Science, and Social Studies.

For career planning, district counselors administer a locally developed instrument as part of the Individual Academic Career Plan (IACP). The IACP uses eight career categories that are based largely on the Career Clusters established by the Department of Education. AISD counselors have modified the clusters to represent the high number of technical jobs in Austin. Age-appropriate versions of the IACP are given yearly to all students in grades 5-12. A class period is set aside each year for students to complete the IACP and to review it with a teacher or guidance counselor.

In addition to the IACP, high school counseling offices at 11 high school campuses and the Akins campus have access to DISCOVER career planning software. Use of the software varies from campus to campus. DISCOVER is published by ACT. It includes the same interest inventory as EXPLORE and depicts results on ACT's World of Work Map. The software license was provided through a grant managed by The Capitol Area Education and Careers Partnership. During the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years, the grant paid the entire licensing fee of \$2,700 per school, or \$32,400. In 2000-01, AISD paid 1/3 of the price, or \$10,800. In 2001-02, the last year of the grant, the Capitol Area Education and Careers Partnership will pay 1/3 of the price, \$10,800. In January, 2002, eight campuses decided to continue paying for the license and four declined. Beginning in 2002-03, the district will have to pay full price to maintain the software license for all campuses that choose to use it.

#### **ADMINISTRATION OF EXPLORE**

EXPLORE was administered to ninth grade students on 12 AISD high school campuses. Of the 6,510 ninth grade students in the district, 4,771 (73%) completed the





supplementary materials offered by ACT, 4 reported that they had used the materials, 1 reported not having used them, and 1 reported not having received them.

***Perceived usefulness of career results***

Of 11 counselors responding to an item on the usefulness of EXPLORE interest inventory results, 1 reported that they were very useful, 6 reported that they were somewhat useful, 2 reported that they were not very useful, 1 reported that they were not at all useful, and 1 reported not having received the results.

**Use of EXPLORE results by students**

Students in two focus groups were asked to comment on their use of the academic subtests. Members of one group had all stated an intention of going to college. The other group was mixed, with 2 students who intended to go to college and 4 who did not.

Members of the college-bound group remembered receiving the scores, but only one member understood the percentile ranking system. Everyone in the group reported having discussed the interest inventory with a counselor in conjunction with the IACP. Members of this group agreed that EXPLORE was more businesslike than the IACP, but most said the results were not in line with their interests. One member commented that the technical portion of EXPLORE seemed heavily weighted toward non-creative jobs.

Several members of the mixed group could not remember receiving their academic results. Most members of the group reported having discussed the interest inventory results with a teacher or counselor in conjunction with the IACP. One member reported seeing other students with interest inventory results, but did not remember receiving his own. Group members agreed that neither the IACP nor EXPLORE was very useful. They complained that the IACP lacked specificity and that the EXPLORE results were not in agreement with their interests.

Neither group could recall using the academic results or discussing them with teachers or counselors, though members of both groups reported feeling good when they saw high scores.

**SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS**

AISD administrators were able to add 12 supplemental items to EXPLORE. The items used were related to computer use, work plans, tutoring and community

involvement. Item writers from the Office of Program Evaluation and the Office of Technology Services reported in interviews that they had collaborated with an administrator in the area of dropout retention. However, that administrator left the position, and the incoming administrator was not made aware of the EXPLORE results. Administrators in the Office of Technology Services stated in interviews that they had not been made aware of the results.

#### **TIMING OF EXPLORE IN THE CONTEXT OF AISD'S TESTING SCHEDULE**

The testing calendar for the 2001-02 school year shows that eighth grade students are scheduled to take 15 district-level tests. During the same period, ninth grade students are scheduled to take 7 district-level tests. Eighth grade teachers and principals expressed reluctance to add another test to the schedule and district administrators agreed, so EXPLORE was administered early in the ninth grade in the 2001-02 school year.

#### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

During the pilot year of EXPLORE at AISD, difficulties with administration of the examination limited the effectiveness of the assessment. Most of the problems with administration stemmed from confusion over test scheduling requirements and resource shortages. The Office of Systemwide Testing assisted campuses with scheduling and resource problems during the 2001-02 administration.

Additionally, there was widespread failure in the district to use the results of EXPLORE. Counselors reported having used the interest inventory portion, but teachers and students reported that they hadn't used the academic results. Administrators reported that they had not used the supplementary items.

Distribution was the most frequently reported problem. Results were sent to each campus office in November, but many teachers reported that they had not received results in time to use them. Similarly, central office administrators who could have used the supplemental items related to instructional technology or dropout retention, never received them.

Another likely impediment to use of the results was difficulty interpreting them. Study guides, which may have helped teachers to interpret EXPLORE data and use them

in lesson planning, were not widely distributed until May, 2001. Also, students reported that they did not understand the scale score reporting system used by ACT, and the district offered no system to explain results to them.

EXPLORE includes the only nationally normed achievement test currently administered at the high school level in AISD. In addition, curriculum staff reportedly believe that EXPLORE is a good predictor of student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, which will be the state standard assessment, beginning in 2003. EXPLORE also includes potentially valuable career information. Those data are only valuable, though, if they are used, and EXPLORE is expensive and time-consuming. District officials should monitor 8-d

