

Head to Head Should the ACT be mandatory or voluntary?

by Natalie Musselman, Staff Writer

For 52 years, the dreaded ACT test has been challenging college hopefuls across the country. Unlike most other states, Tennessee requires high school students to take the ACT. Riverdale High School has a designated test date of April 3, 2012 for the in-school administration of the test. Though some find the in-school mandatory test ludicrous, the required testing is truly in the best interest of the students.

The benefits of the in-school test include preventing procrastination. Too often students wait until senior year, dangerously close to application deadlines, to take the ACT. The students lack experience and are consequently more nervous than necessary because colleges receive the results from that test alone. Another situation such as this occurs when a student, who previously was not going to attend college, decides to apply. If living in a state like Tennessee, this student has his or her bases covered when the time for college application deadlines approach. By requiring the students to take the test, states can more effectively end this potentially lethal procrastination.

In addition to preventing procrastination, the school-wide ACT aids students who cannot afford to take the ACT. Because the school pays for all students, those who cannot spare their money are given an equal opportunity to take the test and get an excellent score. Along with financial comfort, students also get

emotional comfort. In-school ACTs allow first-time test takers to be in a familiar environment and among familiar people. For the students who take the ACT seriously, this added sense of comfort could potentially raise scores.

Traditionally, the schools that test 100% of students have a lower average of composite scores. Tennessee averages a 19.5 score on the ACT, a good score considering the highest average composite score is a 24.2. Although Tennessee is in the bottom two states, other schools, with only slightly higher scores, test a much smaller percentage. In the top ten states for ACT scores, the states tested around 9-28% of their students (with the exception of Minnesota, who tested 72%).

All in all, it is the score of the individual student that matters, not the state average. For the students who put effort into the ACT, the in-school test date provides opportunity for students to be in their comfort zone and get the best score possible. By, accustoming students to the ACT, schools can effectively raise scores on later attempts of the test or provide opportunities for students who were not previously able to take it.

'Race to the Top' may stumble on the required ACT scores

by Melinda Lewis, Junior Editor

Tennessee created its own obstacle in its "race to the top" by requiring all high school graduates to take the ACT. The ACT is a national college admissions examination, however not all graduates intend to pursue higher education. They have no investment in their results and therefore, have no reason to care about

their score. This unnecessary testing is a waste of their time and also brings down the composite score of the state.

Statistics recorded from the 2011 ACTs illustrate this.

According to ACT.org, Tennessee is ranked 49th in the nation, with a composite score of 19.5. It is one of only eight states to require all graduating students to take the test. Six of these rank in the bottom ten. All eight are in the bottom twenty.

The state with the highest composite score, Massachusetts with a 24.2, only tests 22% of its high school students, the ones who have a true desire to attend college.

AP v. CLEP: Which provides the best chance for college credit?

Advanced Placement (AP) classes are college-level courses available to high school students. They also give the opportunity of earning college credit for the bargain price of \$87 and a passing score on the AP Exam. However, the exam may prove to be challenging to even the most exceptional student.

A less-known method for acquiring credit is taking the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) in college. This exam is available at over 2,900 colleges and gives credit based on prior knowledge.

2008 RHS graduate Sophie Paraiso took both AP and CLEP exams. “The CLEP test was pretty simple in comparison to the AP. I had gotten credit for one English class from the AP exam, but I got even more for Spanish from the CLEP and it was free.”

However, taking AP classes shouldn't be ruled out completely. These classes impress college admission counselors and help students develop college-level academic skills.

“I would definitely suggest taking both AP and CLEP, because some courses aren't offered to CLEP out of. AP classes also help you prepare for college,” said Paraiso.

If college is the goal, then AP classes and tests aid in preparing for what is expected in college. Students develop the type of advanced study skills and critical thinking necessary to succeed for university-level courses. The CLEP Test can provide a second chance if needed. Ultimately, the greatest value lies in the foundation built by taking the Advanced Placement classes and their corollary tests.