

ACT EXPLORE Report

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Submitted by:

**Mr. Dan Smith
Principal**

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Introduction

The ACT EXPLORE test is administered in either 8th or 9th grade and provides a standardized measure of academic progress in the areas of English, Reading, Mathematics, and Science. For the 2009-2010 School Year, we chose to administer the test to all 9th grade students in September. The tests are broken down as follows:

EXPLORE English Test

- Usage/Mechanics
 - o Punctuation
 - o Grammar and Usage
 - o Sentence Structure
- Rhetorical Skills
 - o Strategy
 - o Organization
 - o Style

EXPLORE Reading Test

- Prose Fiction
- Humanities
- Social Studies

EXPLORE Mathematics Test

- Pre-Algebra
- Elementary Algebra
- Geometry
- Statistics/Probability

EXPLORE Science Test

- Earth/Space Sciences
- Life Sciences
- Physical Sciences

(All three of these areas can use the following skills: Data Representation, Research Summaries, and Conflicting Viewpoints)

In addition to the measures of academic progress, the EXPLORE test measures the following:

- **Needs Assessment** – collects information about students’ perceived needs
- **Plans and Background Information** – gathers information about students’ school coursework plans, educational and career plans after high school, and other relevant background information
- **Interest Inventory** – helps students explore personally relevant career options

Longitudinal Assessment Plan

The ACT EXPLORE test serves as the entry measure in the series of longitudinal assessments that comprise the ACT College Readiness System. The other assessments include the PLAN (usually given in 10th grade) and the ACT (usually given in 11th and 12th grade). At the current time, we do not

administer the PLAN or the ACT at South Hadley High School. A small number of students (25-50) do attend a local test site and participate in the ACT testing. We are still discussing to what degree we should expand our involvement with the ACT College Readiness System.

Use of EXPLORE Results

Individual student EXPLORE results were distributed to parents and students at an Informational Session held on Monday, November 16th in the High School Auditorium. We had approximately 100 parents and students attend that session. In addition, we had another 5-10 parents attend a second, more brief, session the next day at 7:00 a.m. in the High School Library. At these informational sessions, we reviewed with parents how to get the important information from the individual assessment report form.

Additionally, we've published a brief portion of this report in the December 2009 SHHS Newsletter and certainly plan to release the rest of the data in subsequent newsletters.

As importantly, our guidance staff was able to meet with the freshmen, in small groups, to review the use of the EXPLORE results.

In addition to receiving the individual student EXPLORE results, we received a number of reports that provide a summary of data across the class. The data included in this report comes from those documents.

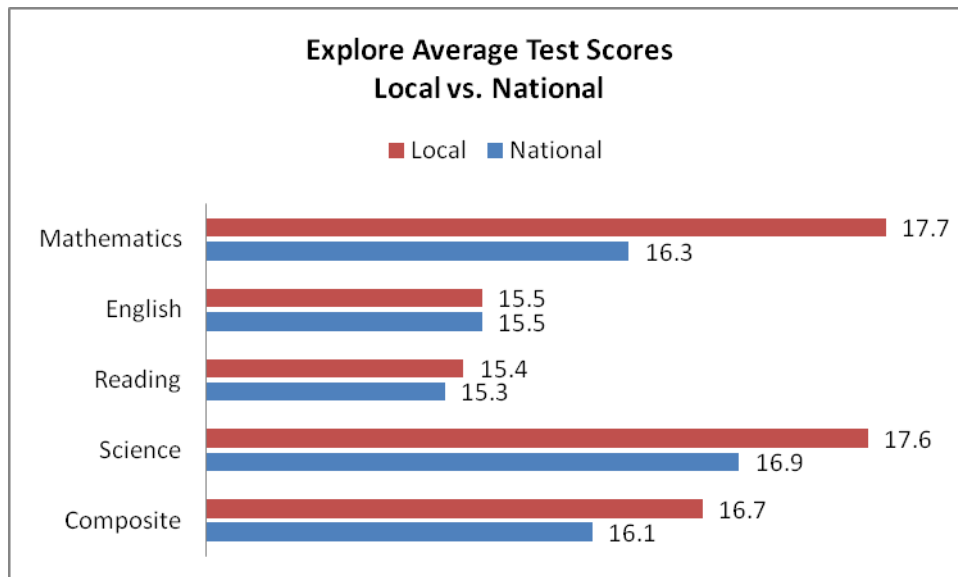
We end the report by listing the recommendations that we believe we can draw from the data provided. If we are able to give this data on a yearly basis, in future years we can report on trends over time.

September 2009 ACT Explore Data for SHHS

In looking at the data obtained, we started with the questions we wanted answered. They include:

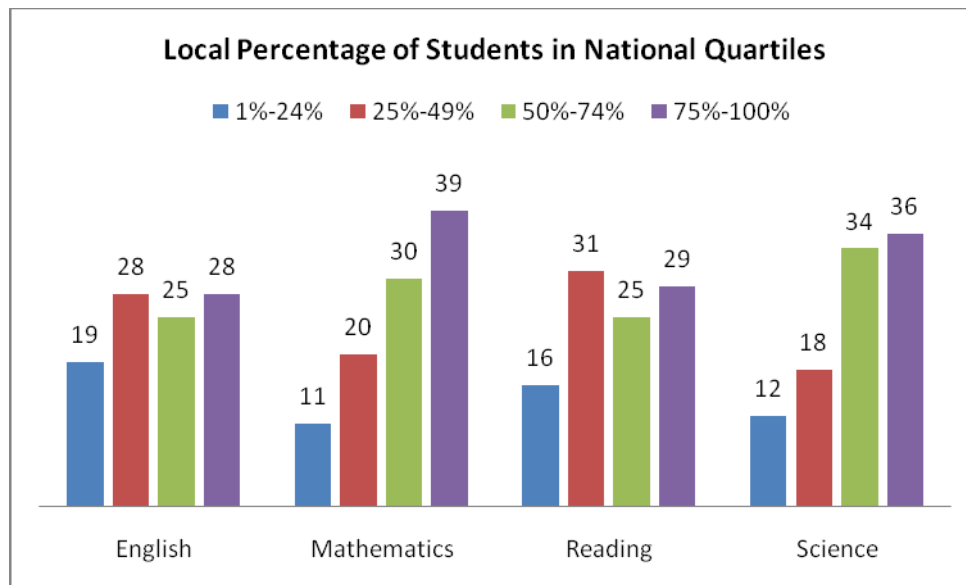
1. How do the EXPLORE scores of our students compare with that of students in the national norm group?
2. How do the EXPLORE scores of our students compare with those of students in the national norm group when broken down by quartiles?
3. Are our students achieving similarly across gender groups?
4. Compared to the national norm group, are our students on track to be college ready when they graduate from high school?
5. What are the post secondary plans of our students?
6. In what areas did our students express the need for help?
7. In what areas did our students express their career preferences?
8. Based on student responses to the Career Interest section, what are our student career preferences?
9. What are the recommendations we can make from looking at this data?

How do the EXPLORE scores of our students compare with that of students in the national norm group?



From this data it is evident that we are performing better than the national norm group in mathematics and science. We are essentially performing on average with the national norm group in English and reading. This data is useful in showing that, in general, we need to look at how we can improve our English and reading performance.

How do the EXPLORE scores of our students compare with those of students in the national norm group when broken down by quartiles?

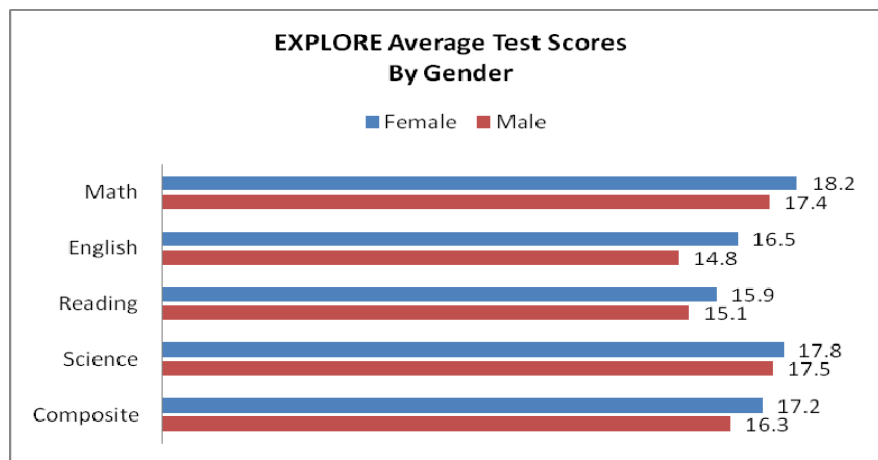


This chart allows us to look at our student performance in finer detail – from global averages to breakdowns by quartiles. From the chart above, it can be seen that:

- 47% of the students scored in the lower two quartiles in English while 53% of the students scored in the upper two quartiles.
- 31% of the students scored in the lower two quartiles in Mathematics while 69% of the students scored in the upper two quartiles.
- 47% of the students scored in the lower two quartiles in Reading while 54% of the students scored in the upper two quartiles.
- 30% of the students scored in the lower two quartiles in Science while 70% of the students scored in the upper two quartiles.

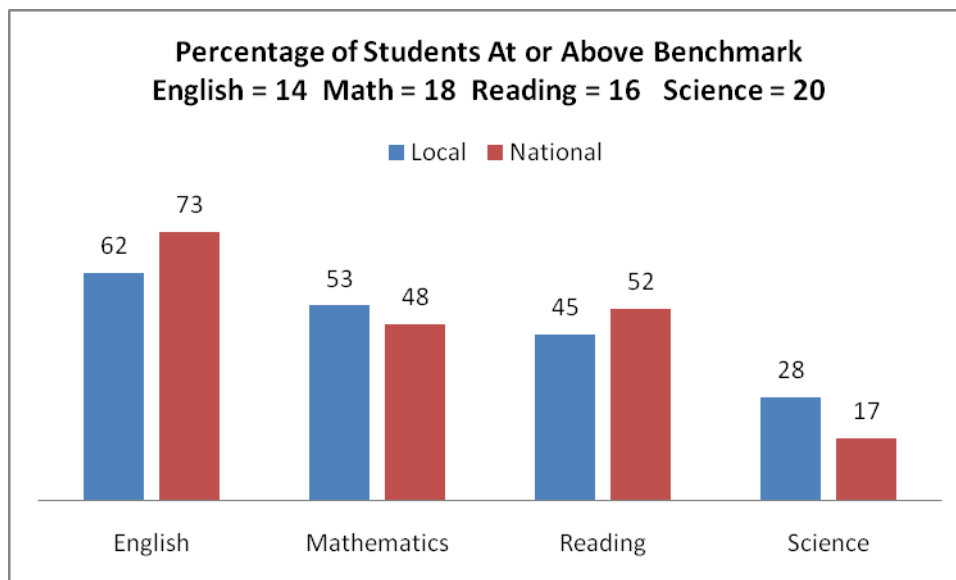
From this data, we can see that approximately half our students need growth in English and reading, with 19% in English and 16% in reading needing substantial support. In addition, we can see that approximately 30% of our students need support in mathematics and science, with 11% in mathematics and 12% in science needing substantial support.

Are our students achieving similarly across gender groups?



As can be seen by the chart above, the females are outperforming the males in all categories. Most notably, the females are well ahead of the males in English and closest in Science.

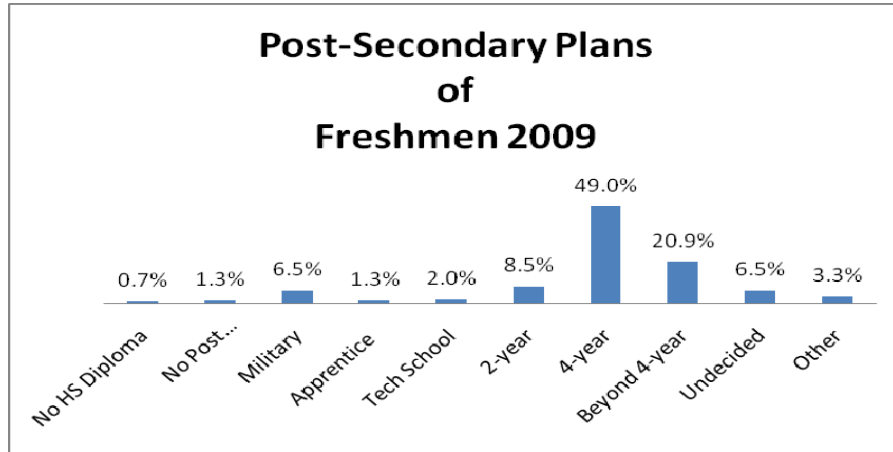
Compared to the national norm group, are our students on track to be college ready when they graduate from high school?



The ACT uses a research-based system of benchmarks to determine the chance by which students will successfully be able to obtain grade of “C” or better in college. The benchmarks for each area tested are as follows: English = 14, Math = 18, Reading = 16, and Science = 20. If students earn those scores or higher, they have at least a 50% chance of earning “C” grades in college. In general, the mathematics and science strengths of the freshman class are evident when comparing their performance to the national norm group in the chart above. Likewise, the weaknesses in English and reading are also evident when compared to the national norm group. At the same time, this data

shows the relative strengths and weaknesses across the subjects. It is here that we see we the need work in all areas, but for significant work in science.

What are the post secondary plans of our students?



Grouping this data together, 2% of the students either don't plan to get a diploma or don't plan to participate in any post secondary education. 6.5% of the students are undecided. 3.3% of the students have plans other than those listed in the chart. This leaves 88.2% of the students planning some form of post secondary education/training/ or military experience. 69.9% of the students plan to attend a 4-year college or beyond, a percentage somewhat higher than what we currently experience. Also of interest is the fact that 8.5% of the students are already indicating a preference for attending a 2-year college program.

In what areas did our students express the need for help?

- 52% - 80 students indicated needing help exploring options after high school
- 50% - 77 students indicated needing help improving their study skills
- 45% - 69 students indicated needing help improving their public speaking skills
- 34% - 52 students indicated needing help improving their writing skills
- 31% - 48 students indicated needing help in improving their reading speed or comprehension
- 31% - 48 students indicated needing help in improving their mathematics skills
- 22% - 34 students indicated needing help in improving their computer skills

Of the questions asked, clearly 40%-50% of the students indicate needing help in exploring options after high school, improving their study skills, and improving their public speaking skills.

In what areas did our students express their career preferences?

- 47 students selected Science & Technology
- 34 students selected Technical
- 24 students selected Arts
- 21 students selected Social Services
- 18 students selected Administration & Sales
- 2 students selected Business Operations
- 2 students did not respond

Students were asked to indicate what career area was most interesting to them. The top three categories are: Science & Technology, Technical, and the Arts. Least favorite were Business Operations and Administration & Sales.

Based on student responses to the Career Interest section, what are our student career preferences?

- 32 students answered questions indicating Social Services
- 27 students answered questions indicating Arts
- 26 students answered questions indicating Science & Technology
- 23 students answered questions indicating Technical
- 20 students answered questions indicating Business Operations
- 14 students answered questions indicating Administration & Sales

Interestingly, student career preferences look somewhat different based on their answers to the specific questions asked in the Career Interest section of the test. While Science & Technology and the Arts remained in the top three, Social Services replaced the Technical area. Likewise, Business Operations and Administration & Sales fell in the bottom two rankings, just in reverse order.

Summary

What are the recommendations we can make from looking at this data?

Strengths:

- Better than average achievement in mathematics; 39% of the students performed in the highest quartile with 69% of the students performing in the top two quartiles
- Better than average achievement in science; 36% of the students performed in the highest quartile with 70% of the students performing in the top two quartiles
- Students indicate they need the least help with using computers

Recommendations:

While the SHHS staff will be addressing the myriad recommendations listed below, it must be noted that these recommendations have implications at the lower grade levels of our school system. Just as the strengths noted above are entirely attributable to the staff in the lower grades, so too, must we look within the practices of our lower grades to find ways to assist in addressing the following recommendations. Overall, as a school, our next step is to begin an item analysis of the teste areas described below so we can identify specific recommendations for improvement beyond just a global statement of need.

- We need to improve the English skills of our students. With 19% of our students scoring in the lowest quartile and 47% of our students performing in the bottom two quartiles, this is definitely an area of need. When studying the disaggregation by male/female, there is almost a 20 point difference between the males and females. This may be an area to explore.
- We need to improve the reading skills of our students. With 16% of our students scoring in the lowest quartile and 47% of our students performing in the bottom two quartiles, this is also a definite area of need.
- In working to get students to meet the benchmarks set by ACT for college success, along with English and reading, we need to improve our science performance. While our students performed better than the national norm group in science, relatively speaking, it is our lowest performing area overall when compared to the benchmarks set by ACT.
- Over 50% of the students indicated a need to learn more about options after high school. This information coupled with our 2009 Alumni Survey data that indicated this topic as an area for improvement, substantiates the need to re-examine our post secondary and career awareness practices and to develop improved practices in this area. There is not a tremendous difference between students' stated plans and the results of the Career Interest questions, but certainly students are voicing a need in learning more about their options.
- 50% of the students also indicated a need to learn more about effective study skills. We have made a substantial investment in the "Tracks To Success" 9th grade initiative to help students begin (or continue) to practice effective organizational skills. In addition, our introduction a few years back, of our planner system has helped teach students about yet another organizational tool. The next level of work should have us focusing in on how to study various types of content (getting information from a textbook, learning from verbal presentations in class, how to effectively study for tests, etc.)

- 45% of the students indicated a need to improve their public speaking skills. This information, coupled with our 2009 Alumni Survey data that indicated this topic as an area of improvement, reinforces the need for us to address this skill across the curriculum. Many courses require students to make presentations to the class in a variety of formats. Our school might benefit from the implementation of a common rubric so students can work on their oral presentation skills consciously and in various settings. (It is interesting to note that while this is a standard in the DOE Curriculum Frameworks it is a standard that doesn't get measured on any test and therefore takes a back seat to other, more "important" standards that are measured.)
- 34% of the students indicated a need to improve their writing skills. We are in the third year of implementing a school-wide writing rubric and have had some quality discussions as a faculty as we try to "calibrate" our selves to a quality writing standard. The discussions that come from these calibration activities are powerful and need to be continued. Our final step in implementing the school-wide writing rubric will be to consciously develop strategies that engage students in goal setting and reviewing their personal progress in writing over their entire school experience.