

# CONNECTING STUDENT GROWTH

## ELEMENTARY TO HIGH SCHOOL



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**—Maria Scopino, College and Career Readiness Coordinator**

For many schools and districts, having consistent data to track students’ progress toward college and career readiness across buildings, grade levels, and years is a long sought after goal. But, the thought of devoting more time and resources to external assessments and putting undue pressure on students and teachers often prevents that goal from being reached. That is where Fox C-6 School District near St. Louis, Missouri was four years ago.

**“The main thing in our district was we didn’t have a districtwide assessment that we could use from year to year,” said Maria Scopino, College and Career Readiness Coordinator.**

Since then, the district has put together a comprehensive assessment plan using ACT solutions that has limited their impact on instructional time and aligned data from grade 3 through high school:

- Grades 3-9: ACT® Aspire®
- Grade 10: PreACT®
- Grade 11: The ACT test or ACT WorkKeys®

Fox C-6 first began using ACT Aspire three years

ago. “The first year we did grades 5, 7, and 9 just so that we would hit something in elementary, middle school, and high school,” said Maria. “Then we saw the score reports and what the kids were gathering from it, and we knew that we had to immediately add this into other grade levels.”

Right away, the district saw the importance of plotting a data point for every student, in every subject, every year. The emergence of trend lines allowed the district to identify what students know and don’t know, and implement academic intervention before it’s too late.

**“Every two years is too long of a wait to develop a trend line. Every year is great, but starting in eighth grade is also too late. If you’re going to make a difference for a kid, you’ve got to start somewhere in elementary school because by the time you get to sixth grade, if you have a trend line that’s going in the wrong direction, you can really make a difference and change a kid’s life,” said Declan FitzPatrick, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction.**

The visualization of student growth data relative to their national peers and their own readiness for college and career was remarkable to district and school administrators. Today, Fox C-6 uses Aspire to validate the progress students make in the classroom. “The goal is to have a once-a-year external assessment that reassures us that success on our internal assessments translates to success and moving toward college and career readiness,” said Declan. But, until recently, the district still had a gap between grades 9 and 11.

The adoption and administration of PreACT gave the district a way to fill that gap, and:

- Provided students with a predicted ACT score
- Gave teachers test administration practice prior to the higher stakes ACT test
- Identified students who could benefit from test prep classes

“If kids are already hitting a 26 or 27 before the spring of their junior year they probably don’t need the ACT prep class,” said Declan. “But for those kids in the range from 18 to about 24, a semester of focused ACT prep can change a kids prospects for college.”

Until this year, the Missouri Department of Education paid for every junior in the state to take the ACT test. When the state stopped providing the test, the school district stepped in. **“We felt the importance of it in our district, so we still had all juniors take the ACT,”** said Maria. In February, Fox C-6 administered the ACT test during the school day to their juniors.

The data the school district receives from ACT assessments has allowed them to do much more than monitor students’ academic progress. Counselors and teachers use score reports to start conversations with students and parents about

their future. “When parents see data about where their kid is on their growth toward college and career readiness, they have questions, kids have questions, and teachers have questions about what it means and what can be done about it because it’s a marker that means something to them and that they believe in,” said Declan.

Score reports have helped students understand they have the potential to attend college, and interest inventory and career information is used to direct students toward the classes and programs that help them achieve their goals.

**“Our goal is to make sure every kid graduates as an expert in something that they’re going to love to do for the rest of their lives,”** said Declan.

“So if a kid knows they are going down a career path, not going to a four-year, post-high school institution, we want them to get advanced in that career training. We know, mostly from ACT research, the demands of mathematical understanding, reading and writing, and critical thinking for a career path are equivalent to college entry. But you need a test that is more tightly aligned to going into a career field.”

This year the school district is piloting WorkKeys with Missouri Options students (those at risk of not graduating with their peers) who are not planning to attend college. “If that goes well we would open that for all kids in the future,” said Maria. “Based on their interests, counselors would be able to help them determine whatever is best for their future whether they would take the ACT test or ACT WorkKeys. Right test, right kid was my goal.”

Fox C-6 School District is only getting started with their comprehensive assessment plan but is already seeing substantial results and looking forward to the future.



**“If we really care about kids, what we want are better results on the tests that are going to get them into college and college scholarships. When we say we value the ACT results and we’re going to take assessments once a year to find out where your kids are moving towards that college and career readiness benchmark, parents say that’s a value they can get behind.”**

**—Declan FitzPatrick, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction**