

HOW ONE OHIO HIGH SCHOOL IS TURNING GRADUATES INTO DAY-ONE EMPLOYEES USING ACT® WORKKEYS®



This Ohio district's decade-long commitment to boosting opportunities for students results in college credit, career pathways, and partnerships with regional employers and postsecondary educators.

700+

students have participated in career readiness programs.

210

WorkKeys NCRCs earned by students.

100%

of participating students find employment after graduation.

GOING ALL-IN ON HELPING STUDENTS BUILD CAREERS

Piqua High School in Miami County, Ohio, serves more than 900 students in a community rooted in manufacturing and trades. The school aims to give every student a clear pathway to what comes after graduation — a job, a trade, or a college degree.

To support that mission, Piqua has spent many years creating career readiness programs for their students.

Career readiness at Piqua begins the moment students arrive as freshmen. Through the Success Bound program, all ninth graders complete a course combining financial literacy, YouScience aptitude assessments, and Flex Factor — a pre-apprenticeship advanced manufacturing program with the career center at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. More than 150 students earn a state-recognized pre-apprentice credential each year through this course alone.

To help students build the foundational skills they'll need to master their career paths, Piqua's programs use the full ACT® WorkKeys® system: ACT® WorkKeys® curriculum, ACT® WorkKeys® assessments, and the ACT® WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate™ (NCRC®). The school is also active in the region's ACT® Work Ready Community® (WRC®), which uses WorkKeys to help educators, regional employers, and government entities communicate the skills needed to improve the local workforce.

The Ohio Department of Education covers the three core WorkKeys assessments — Applied Math, Graphic Literacy, and Workplace Documents — needed to earn a WorkKeys NCRC. Scott Bloom, Piqua's director of secondary curriculum and instruction, believes the foundational skills preparation they provide is worth every penny.

"There's a purpose to every assessment we use," Bloom said. "Students taking WorkKeys want to know: where are my job-entry skills, and how can I use them to get that first position?"

By junior and senior year, students enroll in work-based learning — currently about 60 students, the highest in three years. WorkKeys curriculum serves as core instruction: students pretest on each skill area, work through questions up to Level 7, take the formal assessment, then move to the next skill area. **Over the past two years, Piqua has seen its highest-ever WorkKeys scores, with a marked increase in students scoring in the 4, 5, and 6 level range.**

Every student who completes the program has found gainful employment because "the folks who are employing them understand that we are preparing them to enter into the workforce," Bloom said.

WorkKeys curriculum really is foundational learning for workplace-required skills. It helps students not just prepare for the test, but to build skills that will be present when they take their first job.

Scott Bloom
Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction,
Piqua High School

WORKPLACE SKILLS CERTIFICATES — AND A PATHWAY TO COLLEGE CREDIT

In the six years of Piqua's career readiness programs, students have earned 210 WorkKeys NCRCs, including 74 earned during the 2025-26 school year.

WORKKEYS NCRC LEVEL	STUDENTS (2025-26)
BRONZE	35
SILVER	21
GOLD	8
PLATINUM	10

TURNING A WORKKEYS SCORE INTO COLLEGE CREDIT

One of Piqua's proudest achievements is an articulation agreement with Edison State Community College — conveniently located next door to Piqua High School. Working from the American Council on Education's (ACE) recommendation that WorkKeys NCRC holders receive college credit*, Bloom presented the documentation to Edison State and negotiated a formal agreement: any student earning a Silver NCRC or above qualifies for three free college math credits. In the 2025-26 school year, 22 students qualified — the most in the three years since the agreement launched.

"That's one of my favorite parts of what we're able to do — kids earning real college credit through a WorkKeys score. No cost to the student," Bloom said.

Dr. Paul Heintz, Jr., Edison State's dean of arts and sciences, said Edison's articulation and dual-enrollment partnership with Piqua broadens opportunities for students. "Edison State was excited to have the opportunity to use the WorkKeys NCRC as an additional pathway that allowed us and Piqua High School to recognize the hard work of these career-focused students and support their future goals," he said.

BUILDING AN ACT WORK READY COMMUNITY (WRC)

Bloom has also helped initiate Miami County's participation in the WRC initiative. The county currently has 15 registered employer partners, including Park National Bank and McDonald's, and is actively working toward full WRC certification. Bloom views the education process as ongoing: helping local employers understand what a WorkKeys credential signals about a prospective employee's readiness is central to his role.

"It's really about connecting employers with employable students — and making sure we can communicate that well between those two parties," Bloom said.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CAREER-BOUND PIQUA STUDENTS?

Looking ahead, the WorkKeys Essential Skills assessment — covering work ethic, collaboration, and other career-agnostic competencies — is slated to be added to the ninth-grade Success Bound course during the 2026-27 school year, extending the WorkKeys ecosystem even earlier into students' high school experience.

More than 200 WorkKeys NCRCs, free college credit, and a fully employed graduating cohort tell the story of Piqua's career readiness success.



READY TO BUILD YOUR STUDENTS' PATHWAYS TO CAREER READINESS?

Discover how the WorkKeys system can transform career pathways at your school. act.org/WorkKeysForEducators

*Learn more about the ACE recommendation for college credit.