WorkKeys: Connecting School and Career Readiness

NWABSD: Leading the way by Preparing today’s youth for tomorrow’s jobs
A Tale of Two Tests: HSGQE vs WorkKeys

The WorkKeys Assessment is a nationwide initiative developed by ACT (a nonprofit research organization) that assesses real-world skills. WorkKeys serves as the foundation for the National Career Readiness Certificates, a nationally recognized credential for both employers and job seekers. The State of Alaska, NANA Management Services, GCI and BP all recognize NCRC; in addition, WorkKeys scores may be added to a student’s profile on the ALEXsys (Alaska Labor Exchange system) enabling employers to search for candidates based on WorkKeys scores.

The High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) measures minimum competencies of essential skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Passing all three sections of the HSGQE is part of the requirements to receive a diploma in the State of Alaska.

Bottom line: both tests are important; however, WorkKeys results are nationally recognized, aligned to the workplace and link to a National Career Readiness Certificate recognized and/or required by employers, apprenticeship programs and other career and technical educational training programs.

In a nutshell: it is the one assessment that our students take that directly aligns to their career pathway.
Sample employment opportunities in our region correlated to WorkKeys level Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Locating Information</th>
<th>Applied Math</th>
<th>Reading for Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
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<td>Millwright</td>
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<td>Mine Cutting and Channeling Machine Operators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metal Fabricators</td>
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<td>Home Health Aide</td>
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<td>Medical Records and Health Information Technician</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing Aides, Orderlies and Attendants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Licensed Practical Nurse</td>
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<td>Medical Assistant</td>
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<td>Registered Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Aide/ Assistant</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Educational: Vocational</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
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http://www.act.org/workkeys/skillsearch.html
How are the tests scored?

A person’s performance on the WorkKeys assessments is measured against an established scale or standard and is not measured against the performance of other individuals who WorkKeys helps students:

- Compare their WorkKeys skill levels to the skill levels required for the jobs they want.
- Submit their WorkKeys scores to specific companies to target job search efforts.
- Demonstrate to others (employers, educators, instructors, and counselors) their transferable employability skill levels.
- Use information from skill reports and job profiles to identify areas in which they need further training.

What is on the standard WorkKeys score report?

Two reports—a score summary and memo to examinee—are provided for paper-and-pencil tests. The memo includes diagnostic information that helps examinees understand how to improve their scores. In addition there are two types of scores:

**Level Scores:**
Employers use level scores to decide who to hire and promote. Level scores are based on WorkKeys job profiles—a snapshot of the skills needed for a particular job.

**Scale Scores:** Scale scores are used by educators to show growth in skills over time. Scale scores are not used for hiring or promotion decisions

Which reports do I give to my students?

Students who completed paper-and-pencil tests benefit most by receiving the Memo to Examinee because it helps them understand the skills they need to learn in order to improve their WorkKeys scores.

The *scoring summary* is commonly used by educators and administrators to document student

Where can I find additional ACT Educator Resources?

http://www.act.org/workkeys/resources.html
Momentum continues to build behind the National Career Readiness Certificate, which is now recognized as the most effective strategy for certifying workplace skills and predicting workplace success. When the NCRC™ debuted in September 2006, 10 states were issuing their own credentials. Today, over one million certificates have been issued and more than 40 states have statewide or regional certificate programs. The NCRC is based on three assessments: Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Locating Information.

**Applied Mathematics:**
There are five levels of difficulty. Level 3 is the least complex, and Level 7 is the most complex. The levels build on each other, each incorporating the skills assessed at the previous levels. For example, at Level 5, individuals need the skills from Levels 3, 4, and 5. Examples are included with each level description.

**Locating Information:**
There are four levels of difficulty. Level 3 is the least complex, and Level 6 is the most complex. The levels build on each other, each incorporating the skills assessed at the preceding levels. For example, Level 5 includes the skills used at Levels 3, 4, and 5. At Level 3, examinees look for

**Reading for Information**
There are five levels of difficulty. Level 3 is the least complex, and Level 7 is the most complex. The levels build on each other, each incorporating the skills assessed at the preceding levels. For example, at Level 5, individuals need the skills from Levels 3, 4, and 5. The reading materials at Level 3 are short and direct. The material becomes longer, denser, and more difficult to use as readers move toward Level 7. The tasks also become more complex as readers move from Level 3 to Level 7. At Level 3, readers begin by finding very obvious details and following short instructions. At the more complex levels, tasks can also involve more application and interpretation.
National Career Readiness Certificate Opens Doors for Alaska Cadets: An Alaskan Case Study

The Organization: Alaska Military Youth Academy National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program Fort Richardson Army Post Anchorage, Alaska

The Academic Challenge: Providing graduating cadets with a marketable workplace credential, in addition to a high school diploma and/or GED

The Solution:

• Integrate training into existing curriculum
• Test cadets with WorkKeys® assessments
• Issue National Career Readiness Certificates upon graduation

The Results: Instructors now reinforce traditional classroom instruction with complementary WorkKeys training to provide real-world relevance of core content

• Cadets gain confidence as they work through the online training curriculum in the Academy’s computer lab
• In the most recent graduating class of 136 cadets, 132 (97 percent) earned a Bronze-level National Career Readiness Certificate or better

Academy and ChalleNGe Program Overview

The mission of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is to intervene in and reclaim the lives of at-risk youth to produce program graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults. (The capitalized "NG" in the program name refers to the National Guard.)

John T. "Tom" Hamill principal and lead instructor, Alaska Military Youth Academy

The Academic Excellence Team sees WorkKeys and The Certificate as a meaningful part of all they do. "They really provide our young people with options—options they may never have considered before entering the program," says Hamill. "Earning The Certificate has become a significant motivator. We believe it helps open doors for our cadets."

As the cadets graduate, they are presented with a portfolio containing all documentation earned while at the Academy. "The National Career Readiness Certificate is probably one of the most important," says Hamill. "It’s a truly objective measure of an individual’s skills critical to on-the-job success. It’s accepted nationwide and shows that the cadet is ready to move on towards a productive path."
One of 32 ChalleNGe programs across the nation, authorized and funded through the National Guard Bureau of the Department of Defense, the Alaska Military Youth Academy’s ChalleNGe program is a community-based program that leads, trains, and mentors at-risk youth so they are equipped with life-coping and educational skills.

According to John T. "Tom" Hamill, principal and lead instructor at the Academy, the ChalleNGe program focuses on 16- to 19-year-old Alaskans who have dropped out of an education program. "We attempt to return them to an education, training, or workplace environment and hopefully help them reclaim their lives."

The Academy has been in existence for about 16 years, making it one of the longest-running ChalleNGe programs. Consisting of a 5½-month quasi-military residential phase, followed by a 12-month post-residential phase, the program graduates an average of 130 cadets each cycle.

There is one residential cycle from April to August and another from October to February. Hamill describes the program as "a holistic approach" covering eight core components:

- Leadership/followership
- Responsible citizenship
- Service to community
- Life-coping skills
- Physical fitness
- Health and hygiene
- Job skills
- Academic excellence

Potential cadets must be drug free, they must be out of trouble with the law, and they cannot have a high school diploma. Prior to acceptance into the residential phase of the program, about 200 potential cadets are invited to a two-week pre-challenge program at Fort Richardson Army Post. There is usually some attrition during this phase as the prospective cadets face demanding physical and disciplinary challenges.

Upon successful completion of the pre-challenge phase, cadets begin the 5½-month residential phase. Hamill reports that the majority of cadets complete the full program. The State of Alaska requires the Academy to have a minimum of 125 cadets; they have had as many as 163.

"Anything in the 130–150 range is a good number for us," says Hamill. The Academic Excellence Team of five instructors reporting to Hamill is responsible for the classroom and individual instruction leading to a diploma or GED and a National Career Readiness Certificate. Of the 136 graduates in the most recent cycle, 132 earned a National Career Readiness Certificate—a 97 percent success rate.
WorkKeys and the National Career Readiness Certificate

Hamill first learned about ACT WorkKeys assessments in the mid-1990s when he was with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award–winning Chugach School District, spanning 22,000 square miles of south central Alaska. When he joined the Alaska Military Youth Academy as its principal in 2007, he instituted the assessments and Certificate as part of the curriculum. Cadets may access KeyTrain training modules in the Academy’s computer lab to build their skills and prepare for their WorkKeys assessments in Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information. Hamill and his team work toward getting cadets up to Level 4 in KeyTrain before they take the proctored WorkKeys assessments to attempt to qualify for a National Career Readiness Certificate.

Hamill states that "the training modules and assessments complement the overall classroom curriculum. One of the best things my team and I can do is help these kids earn a marketable credential before they leave the Academy, and that’s just what the National Career Readiness Certificate provides."

Hamill believes that as employers become increasingly aware of just what a Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum Certificate means, the perceived value will rise for job seekers as well as employers looking for

"Selling" The Certificate to Academy Cadets

When the Alaska Military Youth Academy cadets begin the residential program, they are given the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), which provides a literacy level score from 0.0 (below first-grade level) to 12.9, the highest score attainable. (A TABE score of 12.9 refers to the final or ninth month of twelfth grade, representing high school graduation capability or above.) "About one-third of our cadets score below the fourth-grade level on the TABE retest," reports Hamill, "which by definition, is functionally illiterate. Many of them have never been successful academically. Their self-esteem is low, and many of them fear and dread the classroom and testing." This makes it more difficult to convince the cadets of the value of the training and testing to earn The Certificate, but Hamill and his team believe the effort is worthwhile.

"I start by telling them why The Certificate is a good thing to have, why they should value it, where it will take them, and I try to gain their trust that the time and effort they invest will have meaning well into their future." Hamill says that most of the KeyTrain training and WorkKeys testing takes place in the last 6–8 weeks of the 5½-month residential phase. "As they begin to see their KeyTrain scores rise, they gain confidence. And when they pass their first WorkKeys assessment with a 3 or better, you can just see the excitement and momentum build. They often want to take the second and third assessments right away once they have a taste of success."