

# WHY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE PLAN (P-ACT)

by Michael J. Chapman

The P-ACT or “PLAN” is being sold to schools and parents as a “pre-ACT test” and a “career exploration” tool for sophomores. While both are useful goals, the fact is PLAN does neither. PLAN is really part of a larger system meant to trap schools and students into the “School-to-Work System” and steer students toward predetermined lower-level jobs. This report explains how.

## 1. DOES PLAN PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE ACT?

Page one of the *PLAN Program Handbook* (2001-2002), given to administrators of PLAN, explains it “*will help students perform their best when they take the ACT Assessment.*” Therefore, one would expect PLAN and the ACT to have similar content. However, a careful reading of the handbook reveals the truth. Page 1 also explains “PLAN focuses on knowledge and skills obtained prior to or early in secondary education...” Page 5 further explains, “It is important to remember that PLAN does not measure everything students have learned up to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade nor does any particular form of this test measure everything necessary for students to know to be successful through grade 12 and in college.”

If this test is based on elementary or early secondary material and does not measure everything necessary to show success through 12<sup>th</sup> grade or college, how can it prepare students for the ACT? It cannot even teach them what content to expect on the ACT. Furthermore, the handbook states, “no colleges were consulted as to what material should be on the PLAN.” (p.5) Since the ACT IS based upon material colleges expect and PLAN IS NOT, then one must conclude there is NO correlation in content between the two tests.

Yet even the PLAN scores are similar to ACT scores. Again, a careful reading of the handbook exposes a contradiction: Page 4 states, “To provide maximum continuity, the results for PLAN and the ACT Assessment are reported on a common score scale [however] NO RELATIONSHIP IS INTENDED BETWEEN PLAN AND ACT ASSESSMENT SUBSCORES.” (Emphasis added) So what’s the purpose of “maximum continuity” when no relationship was intended in the first place? The truth is, PLAN is NOT a practice ACT, and it cannot prepare one for the ACT, because there is no correlation in content, and no relationship in scoring between the two tests.

### WHAT, THEN, IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAN AND THE ACT?

The booklet states “The PLAN Student Report provides a range of scores within which a student’s ACT Assessment composite score is *LIKELY* to fall when the student takes the ACT Assessment... This *ESTIMATE* is *BASED ON DATA* consisting of *examinees that were in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 1996* and took PLAN in September, October, or November 1996, and *were in 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 1998* and took the ACT assessment in October 1998.” (p.4.)

In other words, PLAN merely “PREDICTS” what one “MIGHT” score on the ACT because somebody noticed that kids who scored well on PLAN also seemed to score well on the ACT! BUT again, there is “no correlation or relationship” in regard to content or scores between the two tests!

The prediction becomes further convoluted through a system of “norming” to nation-wide surveys of students “*who say they plan on attending college.*” One may as well predict success by surveying which kids like broccoli!

## 2. WHAT DOES PLAN REALLY MEASURE?

First, PLAN is an “assessment” tool, not a traditional “test.” Assessments measure subjective value (as in the “assessed value” of a home). Traditional “tests” measure objective knowledge and report an objective score (i.e. number or percentage correct). PLAN is meant to balance knowledge-based questions with subjective factors in order to report something other than academic knowledge. Thus, a “high score” on an assessment does not necessarily mean the student is knowledgeable.

Consider math assessments for example. A recent article in the Star Tribune touted Minnesota’s number 1 ranking in math scores. (2003) However, the report also revealed that nearly 2/3rds of the students scored below “proficient.” (What does “number 1” mean, if not “proficient”?) Furthermore, according to recent statistics, nearly 40% of Minnesota students *entering college* need remediation in basic math skills.

The contradiction between Minnesota's number 1 ranking and the dismal results can be explained by examining the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (the MCA), and the Nation's Report Card (the NAEP). Both assessments are "aligned" to national standards in mathematics written by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). The NCTM reflects a "constructivist" or postmodern worldview that denies the existence of absolutes.

For example, the NCTM defines "mathematical reasoning" as understanding *that mathematics is man-made, that it is arbitrary, and good solutions are arrived at by consensus.*" (Quoted from Eden Prairie's Connected Mathematics Project Teacher's Guide) The CMP teacher's guide admits, "*Students in Connected Math [based on NCTM standards] often score lower on tests measuring computational skills than students from traditional math programs. But we feel that such a trade-off is acceptable... IN THE WORLD OF WORK.*"

Why is this 'acceptable'? Because, "in the world of work" we only need to ensure that workers are trained to push the right buttons. Colleges, on the other hand, require basic mathematics knowledge and skills, so students may not be properly prepared.

To illustrate this de-emphasis on knowledge, compare the above with the following statement on page 2 of the PLAN Handbook: "The [PLAN] test focuses on *quantitative reasoning rather than memorization of formulas, knowledge of techniques, or computational skill. ...Use of calculators is permitted on the Mathematics Test.*" Clearly, PLAN does NOT attempt to prepare students for the basic computational mathematics of the ACT.

Throughout the handbook, PLAN is described as a "curriculum-based instrument" rather than a *knowledge-based measurement*. Curriculum used to be synonymous with "facts and knowledge." However, the term "knowledge" has been redefined as "skills needed in the workplace."

Page 1, of PLAN states: "Because PLAN...is a curriculum-based instrument, it was important to reflect in tests CURRENT GOALS for the secondary school curriculum and the knowledge and SKILLS JUDGED TO BE IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE CAREER and academic success." Unfortunately, "academic success" is part of the marketing language. The true purpose of PLAN is to steer students away from college toward work-skills training. PLAN is part of the School-to-Work (STW) system.

### **3. PLAN AND THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK SYSTEM:**

To fully understand PLAN, one must first understand the STW system. The STW system was adopted by all 50 states through three federal contracts signed by the nations' governors, which together transformed America's education system in both content and structure.

Goals 2000 came first and replaced broad-based liberal arts curriculum with a postmodern worldview "outcome-based" curriculum. It also brought local schools into "partnership" with the federal government.

STW came next and replaced academic subjects with "integrated" performance themes including "basic skills" needed in the workplace. It also created business/school partnerships, turning our schools into job-training facilities.

Finally, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) mandated the creation of the Governor's Workforce Development Councils and a series of "one-stop career centers" to manage the entire system.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), President Bush's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, did NOT end the system. Instead, it holds state's "accountable" to the three bills mentioned above. Under NCLB "career clusters" (set up under STW) were renamed, "smaller learning communities" (see page 406 of NCLB). Furthermore, NCLB continues to fund the radical national curriculum standards brought in through HR6 under Goals 2000. (see page 243 of NCLB). (For further information, see [www.Edwatch.org](http://www.Edwatch.org) )

#### **HOW DOES "PLAN" FIT INTO THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK SYSTEM?**

PLAN is actually part two of the 4-part Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) meant to direct students into various "career clusters" (now called "smaller-learning communities"). According to the STW planners, only 15% of students will need a college degree in the "new global economy." (from various sources: MDE "Work-based Learning Guide; also: MN Planning; Carnegie; NCEE documentation, etc.) Contrast the planners' expectations with recent polling data showing more than 90% of all parents and 70% of all students name "4-year college degree" as their educational goal. Therefore, the planners needed to come up with a system to help steer children away from a traditional 4-year degree. EPAS is that system!

Page 19, of the PLAN Program Handbook, explains the four parts of EPAS:

PART 1. EXPLORE - 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders: “designed to stimulate career exploration and facilitate development of a plan for the student’s high school academic program.” (Again, don’t confuse “academic” with liberal arts. “Academic” now means, “knowledge and skills needed in the workplace.” - Federal SCANS, STW, etc.)

PART 2. PLAN - 10<sup>th</sup>-grade midpoint of EPAS, “is designed to improve students’ planning and preparation for education, training, work, and career after high school.” [Notice: It does not say PLAN is an ACT preparation. Rather, it says it’s a “planning tool” for education, training, WORK and CAREER AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.]

PART 3. ACT (“for college-bound students”)

PART 4. WORKKEYS: “...is an ACT program that measures high school students’ readiness for the work-place.”

Workkeys is the culmination of the 4-part system and fulfills the requirements established by the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The Workkeys web page ([www.act.org/workkeys/legislat/index.html](http://www.act.org/workkeys/legislat/index.html)), states: “WIA called on communities across the country to meet new standards *for the delivery of workforce development services.*” Therefore, Workkeys, according to the handbook, “*forms the foundation of One-Stop Systems; provides linkages among academic and occupational learning, the job market and employers.*” Page 2 explains how “WorkKeys help:

- BUSINESSES plan training programs and screen prospective employees;
- EDUCATORS evaluate curriculum and provide students with career guidance;
- INDIVIDUALS make career choices.”

St. Paul and Minneapolis public schools were two of many pilot sites that implemented STW. Now, ALL of their 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders are required to “apply” for a specific “career cluster” prior to entering high school. The PLAN acts as the “double-check” to ensure sophomores are assigned to the “correct” career cluster.

You are not out of harm’s way if your school just ‘uses’ PLAN. The point of this report is that PLAN is designed to do something completely different than ‘prepare’ students for the ACT.

#### **4. CAREER TRACKING THROUGH PLAN:**

The PLAN assessment is meant to balance a students “interests” with “abilities” and other factors to determine their suitability for a specific career plan. The student results report the jobs they ought to consider.

Page 22 of the PLAN handbook explains: “The usefulness of the interest inventory results can be enhanced by considering them in light of the student’s *abilities* and *career plans*. *Students often mistakenly think that having interests in an area implies that they also have abilities in that area.* ...Discussions with students may suggest which elements should have priority...and what might be done to bring about a synthesis.” [Factors to consider include:] “Is the plan based on *realistic factors* such as *interest* or *educational development*, or is it influenced by factors such as *parental expectations* and *sex-role stereotypes*?”

In other words, this is NOT simply an interest survey, but a tool meant to steer students to consider “realistic factors” such as their personal interests and *current* abilities, and away from considering such ‘unrealistic’ factors as “parental expectations, and sex-role stereotypes.” So parents, who overwhelmingly hope their children will obtain a 4-year degree, and who have the best interests of their child in mind, are subtly dismissed as “unrealistic” factors. Heaven forbid a young woman might choose the “sex-role stereotype” of wife, mother, or homemaker!

#### **CAREER CLUSTERS, AND THE “WORLD OF WORK” MAP:**

The PLAN kit comes with a pie chart called the “World of Work Map.” The counselor version of the “map” is divided into six sections called “CAREER CLUSTERS” (a STW term) and further divided into more specific “job regions.” Interestingly, the student/parent version of the map shows the same sections, but is labeled with various character traits and interests, which correspond (unseen) to the specific career clusters. Page 15 of the handbook lists each of the possible jobs within each cluster.

It’s always fun for students and *unsuspecting* staffers to “find out” what jobs one ought to consider. But few really know how that determination is made.

Recall, there is no real correlation in content between the PLAN and the ACT. Instead, PLAN predicts ACT success based upon comparison data among other students who have taken the tests. Likewise, there is no real correlation between the interest surveys, character traits, and jobs on the “World of Work Maps.” Instead, one’s

suitability for a job is also a “prediction” based upon answers collected from surveys of other people who hold those jobs.

Even more asinine is the method of determining students’ character-traits through sophomoric questions like: “*Would you rather read, or play a game?*” Experience tells us that individual answers change depending on mood, current circumstances, and other “human” factors that cannot be pinpointed by such questions. A normal response to that question would be, “at times READ, and at times PLAY a game.” But that answer is not an option, so a child answers based upon his “feeling” at THAT moment. Then, DING!... the computer slaps on a label. Unfortunately, a child’s personal “feeling” (let alone, level of maturity) can be misleading and convince them to follow a path contrary to God’s will. Furthermore, one can easily see that many jobs will, at times, require character traits on opposite ends of the wheel - an *improbable* possibility at best, according to this “machine” view of man.

A Christian understanding of man’s nature should convince us that the system is fatally flawed. God calls each of us to specific places - *often beyond our own perceived capabilities*. How can we trust a computer assessment to find God’s will for a child - especially when the assessment is based on childish notions of what they want NOW? Doesn’t it make more sense to provide them with a broad-based, liberal arts, academic foundation preparing them for whatever the future holds?

### **WHERE DID THE WORLD OF WORK MAP COME FROM, AND HOW ARE THE CAREERS REALLY DETERMINED?**

The PLAN paperwork, gives credit to one man, Dale Prediger, “*who developed the Map in the early 1970s and directed the latest revision.*” However, the PLAN handbook hints at the true source, explaining “He [Prediger] obtained *expert ratings of basic work tasks* from the Department of Labor’s Occupational Information Network O\*NET.” O\*NET is the connection between EPAS, “career clusters,” and Economic Planning Boards.

### **ECONOMIC PLANNERS AND LIMITED CAREER CHOICES:**

In order to understand how O\*NET functions within the STW system, we need to revisit the vision of Marc Tucker, president of a tax-exempt, non-profit organization called The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). Prior to the Clinton administration, Marc Tucker, along with partners Hillary Clinton, Pat Harvey (the current St. Paul school superintendent), and others, had a vision to bring the Eastern European “Polytechnical Education System” to America.

The polytechnical System seeks to create a better society through professional economic planning. The school system must be restructured to prepare laborers for planned economic needs. Tucker explained that, in the future most jobs would require basic entry-level labor skills. He believes America’s problem is that too many students are in school. (See his report: “America’s Choice: High Skills, or Low Wages,” NCEE 1992) (For more background, see my video, *Guinea-Pig Kids*, or, “Polytechnical Education: A-Step” - written by Robert Beck, University of Minnesota, under a \$4 million dollar US Dept. of Education grant, in 1990.)

Realizing America was not quite ready for such a radical transformation of education, the NCEE spent millions of dollars on focus market research to devise language palatable to Americans. “Polytechnical” became “School-to-Work,” Job-Skills Labor Training became “Performance Standards,” curriculum was “integrated” with “work-based learning;” Forced labor-training became “service-based learning,” etc.

Most American parents want their children to obtain a “4-year degree” so it was important for Tucker to use that term. Therefore, he simply redefined what a 4-year degree meant. Modeled after Sweden and Denmark, Tucker’s plan ends traditional education at 10<sup>th</sup> grade and replaces 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade with career-cluster training and internships. Some students (if the job requires) will continue on to a specific 2-year technical trade school. Thus, Tucker’s “4-years” of “higher education” seamlessly replaces the 4-year liberal arts degree. [NOTE: Post-Secondary Education Option (PSEO) was created in order to begin this transition by serving to convince parents there were more important things than 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Full implementation has not yet been accomplished.]

When President Clinton was elected, Tucker wrote an 18-page letter to Hillary Clinton detailing how implementation should progress. (See the “Dear Hillary” letter posted at: [www.Edwatch.org](http://www.Edwatch.org), reprinted from the congressional record.) President Clinton appointed Marc Tucker to the *Secretaries Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* (SCANS), under the US Department of Labor. At this post, Tucker helped create the “career cluster” system.

SCANS 'experts' determined each state's "career clusters" based on regional resources and planned labor needs. School districts apply through their local workforce boards for specific clusters they may offer. (See "Making Connections", MN CFL, 1996.) The national listing of jobs within each cluster is listed in the "Occupational Information Network, or O\*NET. Each job is numbered and cross-referenced to qualifications, task-skills needed, and future need. Students in the clusters, receive "portfolios" or Individualized Education Plans (IEP) carrying the job-numbers and task-skills so prospective employers will know what each "human resource" has been trained to do.

Again, according to the PLAN booklet, it's career clusters, jobs listings, and corresponding "basic work tasks" came from O\*NET.

Furthermore, school counselors are instructed to synthesize "other factors" such as local area labor needs. Though the planners deny it, reports arrive continually from around the country describing how students are being steered into specific educational goals that match local area job needs. One well-known case involved a Las Vegas sophomore who wanted to be a veterinarian. Her assessment showed she was better suited for bartending! Go figure!

Interestingly, the PLAN marketing paperwork speaks of "career *interests*" and "job *exploration*," but the language describing the results speaks of the student's "career *choice*" or "career *preference*." This is consistent with a "Performance Instruction" guide given out at Minnesota's 2000 School-to-Work conference, which stated, "values, attitudes, and *interests* can be learned and taught...*and objectively evaluated*." The "objective" determination of values, attitudes, interests, and *career choices* reflect a utilitarian view of man.

Another problem with this system is that this 'matching' between certain jobs and character traits also reflect a postmodern "liberal" worldview. For example, the job "politician" is not aligned with the character traits of "persuading, influencing, and directing," because the postmodern politician must "compromise" and "build consensus," rather than stand for unchanging principle and engage in debate. Therefore, "politician" is placed in the same category as "counselor," which includes the character traits of "helping, enlightening, and serving others."

Suggested follow-up information for certain jobs also reflects a biased worldview. For example, students under "political science" are directed to the Aspen Institute, and other international leftist political organizations for "further information." And students under "clergyman," are directed to the National Council of Churches (a liberal/globalist organization that believes all religions are equal).

## **5. DATA COLLECTION FOR A PLANNED SOCIETY**

Data-Collection is the key to making the system work. PLAN collects private data about schools, teachers, students, and families.

For example, according to the handbook, "PLAN collects background information about each student who takes part in PLAN (e.g., name, address, birth date, grade, racial/ethnic group, religious preference) as well as information useful in discussing future plans..." (p. 11.)

To facilitate collection, page 17 of the PLAN handbook explains: "ACT provides schools with two self-adhesive labels for each student participating in the PLAN program. This label includes student name, Social Security number (if reported by student), date tested, scores... etc." Since it is a federal offence to require reporting a SS number, a "district-assigned student ID number" to "facilitate matching of records" will be assigned to students who don't.

Under "Supplemental Local Items", districts can collect personal data such as "number of hours spent studying, watching television, working at home or a workplace each day or week, etc." Additionally, "Optional Research and Reporting Services" are available that go into deep detail (see page 17-18) and include data developed from other sources. PLAN is just one data source among many federal, state, and local sources that feed into a single federal database known as SPEEDY-EXPRESS. (See Bev Eakman's book, the Cloning of the American Mind.)

The NAEP (Nation's report card) also collects personal information about students such as how many books are in the home, does the family receive a newspaper, parents level of education, does mom work outside the home, where student's lived on their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, the classroom habits of teachers, and many other facts.

The MN Department of CFL (now MDE), sent all Christian schools a coded survey. Many Christian schools simply filled it out and sent it back without questioning its purpose. The results of those surveys are now included with "the optional research" made available to "those who request it."

PLAN explains how the data may be shared with others. For example, on page 11: “By responding ‘yes’ to question 4...students authorize ACT to SEND INFORMATION - name, mailing address, Social Security number, gender, date of birth, racial/ethnic background, high school, grade, career choice, etc. to colleges and nonprofit organizations...” [Note: Answering “no,” will not stop the collection and dissemination of information to “nonprofit organizations” authorized to see the data.] Responding “yes” to question 4 also indicates the student’s interest in receiving “programs that the student may be interested in exploring” from colleges. In other words, if a student wants program information from colleges, they must authorize PLAN to send out their personal information.

By cross-referencing data at the single collection point, tax-exempt, non-profit organizations and “qualifying schools” conducting research can view personal information about individual schools, curriculum, students, and their assessment scores, and teachers - including basic salary levels. Personal information may also be available to MN Planning and the Department of Employment and Economic Development, which oversee the STW system in Minnesota. According to the Federal Data-Collection Handbook, this information will soon be available to employers accessing the “electronic resume” now being developed.

On page 17, PLAN explains one way the Feds will use the information: “Every school testing 25 or more sophomores will receive a School Profile Summary report...” The report measures composite information against nationwide averages, etc. including such information as, “our students’ career preferences” and how “our students’ performance on PLAN differs by gender and / or ethnic groups.”

Watch out for this one! Under NCLB you may be in violation of federal law if too large a gap exists. Private schools that accept Title 1 federal dollars (school lunch program included) are NOT exempt from such regulations. Under EEOC guidelines, any school accepting “public” funds is by definition, a “public” school. One day soon, Christian (read “public”) schools could be sued for refusing to hire an “atheist” teacher. *“That’s a violation of her first amendment right to religious freedom!”*

The authors of the E-PAS system seek to force participating schools to continue indefinitely in order to *“maintain the integrity of the normed data.”*

## **6. WHAT’S THE BOTTOM LINE?**

PLAN-ACT is being sold as an ACT preparation assessment and a career-planning tool. The former purpose is not true, and the latter purpose cannot work. To date there is no data that these kinds of career assessments produce useful results. Such programs have little chance of producing any useful information since they are based upon a faulty utilitarian (materialist) view of man.

There is nothing wrong with students beginning to think about careers but planners operating under a postmodern and utilitarian worldview, believe they can ‘fit’ children into certain jobs by asking the right questions and using proper assessments. This was the foundation of the polytechnical education system in the Soviet Union where the ONLY purpose of education was preparation for work. Even if your school does not think this way, the PLAN-ACT was developed by people who do.

PLAN is a complete waste of time and resources! It is part of the school-to-work system, provides bad information to students and families, violates data privacy, discourages students from pursuing higher education goals, and encourages leftist-causes. It may eventually entrap private schools into the federal system undermining our basic freedoms and God-given rights. Why would any Christian school willingly participate in such a system? I urge all Christian schools to reject PLAN, and all parents to opt their children out of participation.

Instead, Christian schools (especially) should focus on tests measuring academic achievement based on knowledge and truth. They should also reject a machine-view of man and instead guide and encourage students to seek God’s will for their lives, which often contradicts personal feeling and perceived ability. *“Instead, you ought to say “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”* (James 4:15)

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For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord... - Jeremiah 29:11a