



Survey Summary: Career Readiness Assessment a Viable Option for High School Students

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Introduction

A career readiness survey was sent to high school counselors from a Midwestern state in April 2013 and again in September 2013. The purpose of this survey was to determine the usefulness of an assessment, or assessment modules, that would offer detailed career guidance for high school students transitioning to areas other than four-year degree programs. These areas could include vocational technical schools, community colleges, and the workforce.

Seventy-five people responded to the survey, which asked about respondents' current resources and what additional resources may help them when working with students to be career ready. Survey responses were anonymous and will be used to determine if and how a career readiness assessment would be helpful to students, teachers, and parents.

Background

The education industry focuses much attention on determining whether students are prepared to be successful in college or in a career. However, while two well known and widely used college readiness programs are available (the ACT and SAT), very few definitive career readiness programs, products, or systems exists. Currently, the ACT WorkKeys® and career readiness certifications are addressing these student needs, but much more can be done given the statistics for post high school students.

When parents of high school seniors are asked about their student's post high school plans, nearly 90 percent indicate their son or daughter is going to a four-year college. When those same students are surveyed, about 70 percent indicate they are going to college. In reality, approximately 50 percent of a high school cohort will actually continue on to higher education. Of those students who do attend, only 50 percent (i.e., 25 percent of a high school cohort) receive a four-year college degree, which typically takes four or five years to obtain. This leaves 75 percent of every high school graduating class needing to be career ready.¹

Some high school students are not fully aware of their career interests or skills and cannot determine what their proper career path should be. For those going to a four-year college, this may not be a problem because of the extended time and degree options available to them, which expose them to a variety of career choices. But for those students whose interests and skills may be best suited for vocational technical schools or apprenticeships, the time to make a career decision may be limited.

1 ACT. (2003). *Relationships Between EPAS Scores and College Preparatory Course Work in High School*, ACT Research Report Series. David J. Woodruff, ACT Research Division.

This survey will help Questar in its mission of providing an assessment that serves the needs of these individuals.

Method

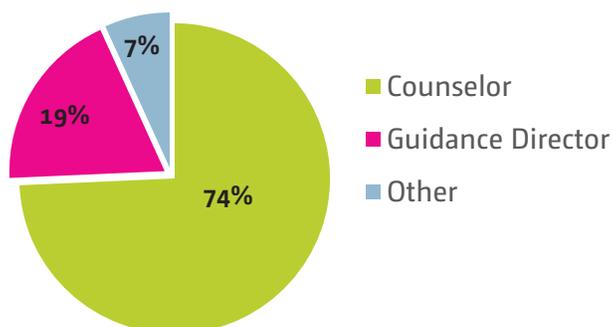
Questar sent the career readiness survey to high school counselors because these individuals are directly involved in assisting students in identifying career options. The survey questions were developed within Questar through research and a series of meetings to provide a succinct and comprehensive survey. The online survey was distributed to the respondents by the state director most involved with working with the counselors. Month-long survey windows were provided in the spring and again in the fall with one follow-up reminder before the end of the survey window.

While statistics were not available on the internal statewide distribution of the survey, it is estimated that about one-third of the potential high school counselors in the state responded to the survey.

Data Analysis

As Figure 1 shows, most respondents were counselors, followed by guidance directors. The remaining 7 percent of respondents coded as “other” included a high school business teacher, a college and career coordinator, an administrator, an assistant principal, and a guidance intern.

Figure 1. Respondents’ Job Titles



Sixty percent of respondents had been in their current position for 10 years or less, 30 percent had been there between 11 and 20 years, and 10 percent had been at their current position for 21 years or more. The average number of years respondents had been at their current position was 10 years.

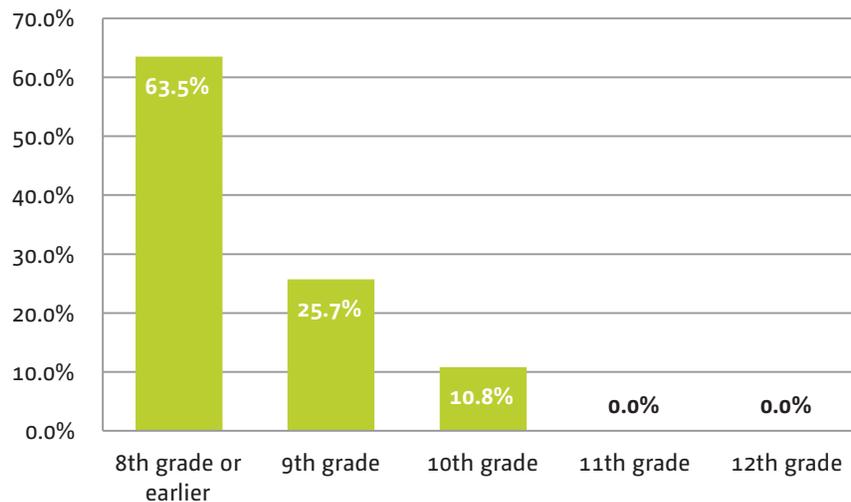
When asked if their current assessments adequately cover the academic skills needed for careers, 29 percent of respondents answered with “mostly yes” or “definitely yes,” whereas 71 percent responded that their assessments definitely don’t, mostly don’t, or somewhat but not adequately cover career-focused academic skills.

When asked if the current assessments adequately cover the workplace skills needed for careers, 21 percent of respondents answered “mostly yes” or “definitely yes,” whereas 79 percent responded that their assessments definitely don’t, mostly don’t, or somewhat but not adequately cover necessary workplace skills.

When asked if they struggle to find resources that are understandable for parents and students, 77 percent of respondents responded “yes” and 23 percent responded “no.” When asked how often students go to them for help in planning their careers, 49 percent of respondents replied “seldom” or “occasionally” and 51 percent responded with “often” or “always.”

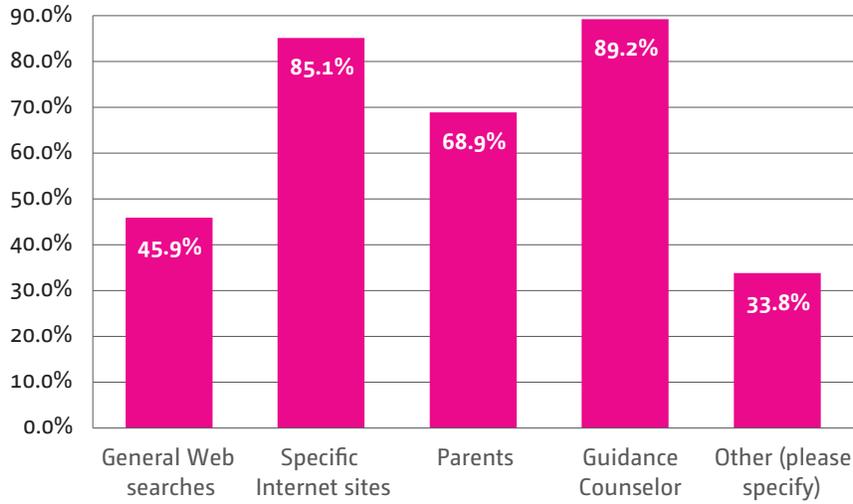
As shown in Figure 2, most respondents thought students should start asking for career guidance as early as middle school and no later than their sophomore year in high school.

Figure 2. When Students Should Start Seeking Career Advice



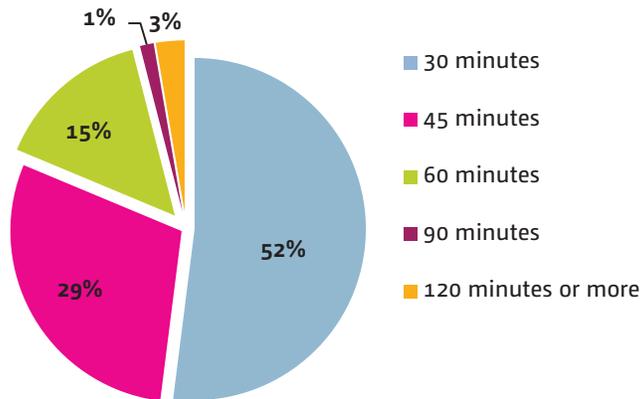
As shown in Figure 3, most respondents thought guidance counselors and specific Internet websites are the best places for students to find career guidance, followed by parents and general Web searches. Suggestions from the 25 people who provided an “other” answer included job shadowing or hands-on experience, teachers and classrooms, career and college experts, and online resources.

Figure 3. Best Places for Students to Find Career Guidance



When asked what is the most time an assessment should take to measure workplace skills, more than 80 percent of respondents chose either 30 or 45 minutes, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Maximum Time to take a Career Readiness Assessment



When asked which type of career assessment they believed students would prefer, most respondents (89 percent) chose the shorter assessment for immediate feedback, whereas 11 percent chose a longer assessment for more detailed but delayed feedback.

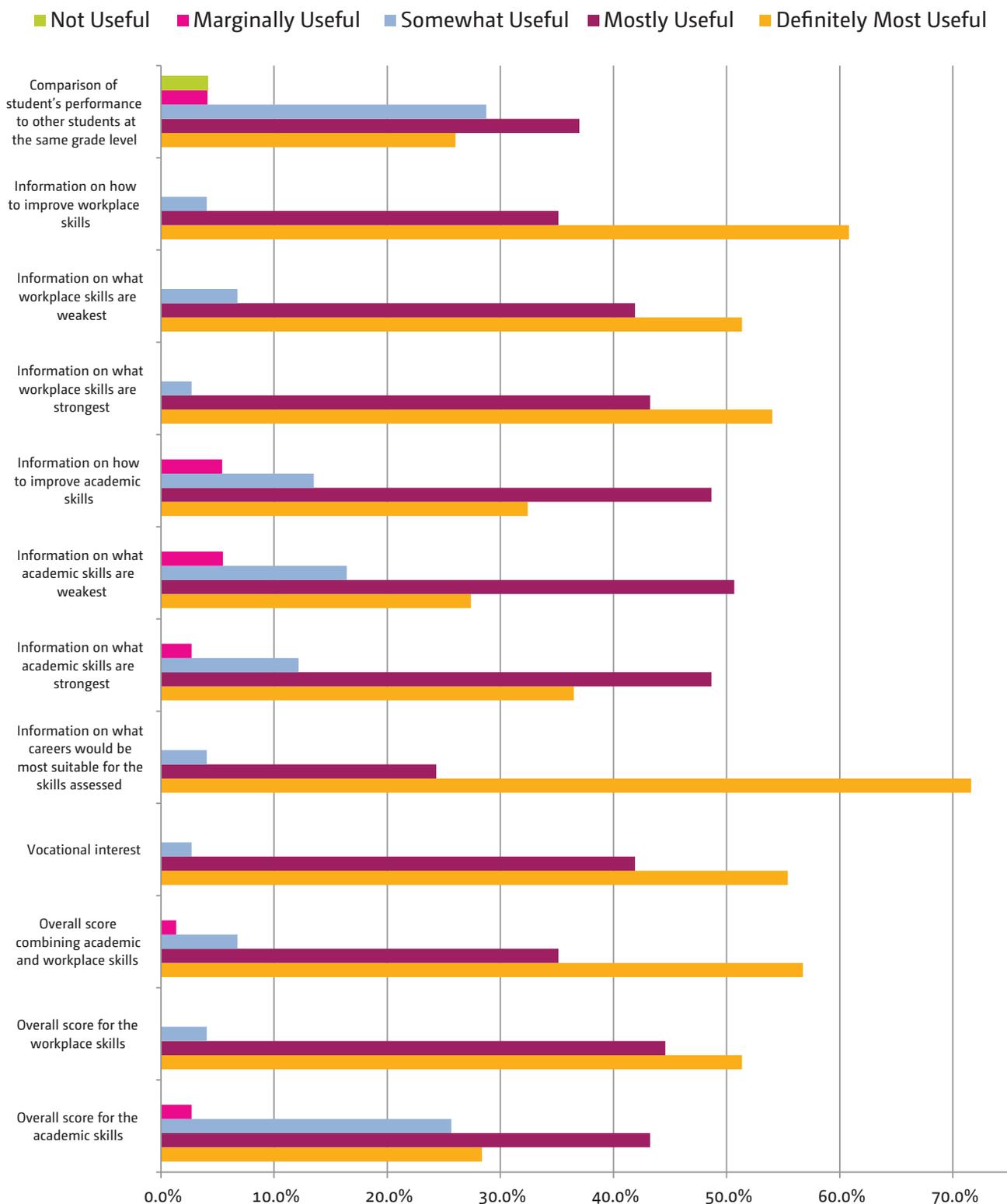
Respondents were posed the following hypothetical situation: “Suppose you were designing a score report for an assessment that measured workplace skills. Please indicate how useful each of the following would be to you, parents, and students.” As Figure 5 shows, most respondents thought that each of the 12 areas were mostly useful or definitely most useful.

In particular, 72 percent of respondents indicated that “Information on what careers would be most suitable for the skills assessed” would be “definitely most useful,” and 61 percent of respondents indicated that “Information on how to improve the workplace skills” would be “definitely most useful.” These two areas received the highest percentages for that answer. One person also suggested that local and regional jobs in suggested career fields or a link to sites of interest in those fields would be helpful.

Of the 39 people who responded to the open-ended question that asked them to describe their thoughts about career assessment and how they would see it being used at their school, approximately 50 percent of them indicated that an assessment dedicated to career readiness would be important and useful.

They noted that this type of assessment would greatly benefit students who do not go on to a four-year college, especially since many of them often do not know what their skills are and lack direction in choosing a path after high school. Even those students who do go on to a four-year college would benefit from a career readiness assessment. Schools focus on students becoming college-ready, but, as respondents commented, it would be nice to have a tool geared toward helping students become career-ready as well. Respondents would use results from a career-focused assessment to provide students with more individualized and clearer direction.

Figure 5. Usefulness of Areas on a Career Readiness Score Report



Conclusion

Guidance counselors and directors seem to have a need for an assessment dedicated to career readiness. Even if they already have a career readiness process in place at their school, any tool geared toward helping students define a clearer post-graduation path is, for the most part, welcomed.

According to the response data from this survey, a career readiness assessment should be short and provide immediate feedback. It should ask students questions about their skills and traits such as integrity, ability to follow directions, attitude toward supervision, attitude toward coworkers, and workplace reading and comprehension. Reports should include information on what careers would be most suitable for the skills assessed, information on how to improve workplace skills, information on what workplace skills are strongest and weakest, vocational interest, information on how to improve workplace skills, an overall score for the workplace skills, and an overall score combining the academic and workplace skills.

Given the large number of skills and traits for which information is desired, the assessment could not be as short as respondents have indicated. However, significant reduction in assessment time can be achieved where computer adaptive testing (CAT) is applicable. This can be addressed by making a module or subtest to adhere to the respondents' thoughts on time of administration. By building a career readiness assessment in modules, quick results and adequate time to administer can be achieved. Modules also allow both the student and the counselor to target areas that a student could explore more than others. For example, a student who is doing well in AP Calculus may not need to assess their mathematics readiness skills and could instead concentrate on the personal traits and skills portions of career readiness.

The responses in this survey provide an insider look at how those directly in contact with students view career readiness and the effectiveness of a career readiness assessment. Therefore, these responses are important to the designing and implementation of a career readiness tool. They are also important because the results highlight the need for a comprehensive instrument. Future research should include a larger sample of responses from multiple states.