

SAINT THOMAS ACADEMY



September 25, 2009

Dear 9th Grade Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

On October 14, 2009, Saint Thomas Academy will administer standardized tests to all freshmen, sophomores and juniors. The 9th graders will take the EXPLORE test, which is the entry point into ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System. This system also features the PLAN test, taken in 10th grade, and the ACT Assessment for college entrance and placement.

EXPLORE combines curriculum-based tests in English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning. These tests are designed to measure students' knowledge and the complex cognitive skills important for future education and careers. The fundamental idea is that the best way to determine how well prepared students are for further education and for work is to measure the knowledge and skills needed in those settings.

The **English test** measures understanding of standard written English – punctuation, grammar and usage, sentence structure, and understanding of the use of strategy, organization and style in writing. The test consists of four essays, or passages, each accompanied by a number of multiple-choice test items. Different passage types are employed to provide a variety of rhetorical situations.

The **mathematics test** measures mathematical reasoning. Test questions cover knowledge and skills, direct application, understanding concepts and integrating conceptual understanding. The items in the mathematics tests are classified according to four content areas: pre-algebra, elementary algebra, geometry and statistics/probability.

The **reading test** measures the student's level of reading comprehension by focusing on the skills used when studying written material from different subject areas such as prose fiction, humanities and the social sciences. These skills include referring to what is explicitly stated in the passage, reasoning to determine implied meanings, grasping the main idea, locate and interpret significant details, understanding sequences of events, comprehend cause-effect relationships, and making comparisons and generalizations. The test does not cover information outside the passages, vocabulary taken out of context or formal logic.

The **science-reasoning test** measures scientific reasoning skills acquired through grade 8. The test presents six sets of scientific information, each followed by a number of multiple-choice test items. Three different formats are used: data representation (graphs, tables and other schematic forms), research summaries (descriptions of several related experiments) or conflicting viewpoints (expressions of several related hypothesis or views that are inconsistent with one another). The items require students to recognize and understand the basic features of, and concepts related to, the provided information; to examine critically the information provided and the conclusions drawn or hypotheses developed. Materials for this test are drawn from the life sciences, Earth/space sciences and physical sciences.

Teachers will administer the EXPLORE test, and results from the EXPLORE test will be shared with you. You may also wish to use www.explorestudent.org for additional information. You can help by making sure your son gets a good night's sleep and eats breakfast before coming to school. There is no make-up date for the EXPLORE so it is important for your son be on time for school October 14. There are no classes following the test. We expect to dismiss students by noon. Please call me at 651.683.1522 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Celeste Heidelberger
Dean of Academics