

# The things you must know about the new South Carolina WIN Ready to Work and Essential Soft Skills implementation

## Researched and Authored By Paul L. Connerty, MPA

*Retired South Carolina workforce investment board executive director and now a workforce development and training consultant with South Carolina based KC Associates, LLC and a former ACT® authorized job profiler.*

---

## Overview

In spring 2018, the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce jointly announced a forward-thinking new direction for the state's collaborative career readiness training, assessment and certification program. An expert panel, consisting of a majority of South Carolina employers as well as educators and workforce and economic development professionals, selected WIN Learning – a national career readiness solutions provider and a leading publisher of next generation career readiness assessments, curriculum and exploration tools – as the state's new implementation partner.

The Department of Education will begin using WIN assessments in April 2018 to benchmark the career readiness skills of 54,000 high school juniors as a component measure of the South Carolina Education and Accountability Act, a performance-based accountability system evaluating the effectiveness of South Carolina public high schools in graduating students with the “*knowledge, skills, and opportunity to be college ready, career ready, and life ready for success.*” (South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59, Chapter 18)

The Department of Employment and Workforce and its workforce and economic development partners including, but not limited to, SC Works, readySC™ and the South Carolina Technical College System, the South Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the South Carolina Adult Education System, and the South Carolina Department of Corrections will transition to WIN as the official provider of career readiness assessments and state-sponsored career readiness certification. While the WIN solution will be funded by the state, the ACT WorkKeys® assessments and corresponding ACT WorkKeys® owned National Career Readiness Certificate® will be commercially available by direct purchase.

The South Carolina WIN solution includes three foundational WIN Ready to Work Assessments (Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information) that are fully aligned to the original ACT WorkKeys® assessments that have been previously used by the State of South Carolina as the qualifying assessments for the WorkReady SC Career Readiness Certificate and the ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate®.

As a result, all current WorkReady SC Career Readiness Certificates, South Carolina issued ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificates®, and ACT WorkKeys® job profiles funded by the Department of Employment and Workforce are fully aligned to the WIN assessments, remain valid, and may continue to be used “as is.”

For employers and others who choose to continue to use the ACT WorkKeys® job profiling system and who may want to update their job profiles to align to the new ACT WorkKeys® branded skills (Applied Math, Workplace Documents, and Graphic Literacy), alignment and concordance tables are being developed for the WIN Ready to Work assessments to the original and new ACT WorkKeys® assessments.

In response to employer demand for forward flexibility and innovation, the WIN solution includes new tools including the WIN Essential Soft Skills Assessment, targeting essential employability and job retention skills including communicating effectively, conveying professionalism, promoting teamwork and collaboration, and thinking critically and solving problems.

Those who successfully complete the series of assessments will receive an official state-sponsored career readiness certificate or potentially two separate certificates (one demonstrating foundational skills and the other demonstrating soft skills; the format for the new state-sponsored certificate/s is still being discussed) signed by the Governor of South Carolina. Like the current WorkReady SC Career Readiness Certificate and the South Carolina issued ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate®, the proposed new South Carolina sponsored certificate/s may be used as an indicator of readiness for post-secondary education, on-the-job training, apprenticeship and/or employment.

WIN provides a comprehensive online curriculum that supports skill development for both the WIN Ready to Work Assessments and the WIN Essential Soft Skills Assessment. The state is currently exploring the opportunity to make the instructional courseware available to local implementation partners statewide. More information is expected soon.

## WIN Assessments

The South Carolina WIN solution includes a combination of four valid and reliable assessments that are aligned to state/national standards for career and college readiness and workforce development system objectives.

- **WIN Ready to Work Applied Mathematics Assessment** - Measures foundational workplace mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- **WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment** - Measures comprehension and application of workplace graphics such as charts, graphs, tables, forms, flowcharts, diagrams, maps, and instrument gauges.
- **WIN Ready to Work Reading for Information Assessment** - Measures comprehension and critical thinking using written text including emails, websites, letters, contracts, signs, notices, policies, and regulations.
- **WIN Essential Soft Skills Assessment** - Measures foundational work habits and employability skills that employers nationwide commonly define as essential to gain and maintain employment including cooperate with others, resolve conflict and negotiate, observe critically, and take responsibility for learning.

The WIN Ready to Work Assessments were developed in collaboration with Measured Progress (measuredprogress.org), a national nonprofit leader in the standards-based assessment industry. The WIN Essential Soft Skills Assessment was originally developed by Castle Worldwide (castleworldwide.com), a national high-stakes industry licensure testing and credentialing company, in partnership with the National Work Readiness Council (nwrc.org) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

All four assessments are career contextualized to simulate on-the-job experiences and application of foundational workplace skills. The assessments are based on a compilation of prevailing employer focused research including, but not limited to, the U.S. Department of Labor SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills); U.S. Department of Labor

*Building Blocks Competency Model*; U.S. Department of Education *Employability Skills Framework*; National Network of Business and Industry Associations *Common Employability Skills*; and Center for Literacy, Education and Employment *Equipped for the Future* standards.

The design of the WIN Essential Soft Skills Assessment and supporting WIN Soft Skills Curriculum are also informed by a more recent soft skills specific study commissioned by the South Carolina Workforce Investment Board and published in 2010 by Dr. Richard Nagle, Ph.D., in partnership with the University of South Carolina. The study gathered input from the South Carolina business community through 46 focus groups statewide and further defined essential soft skills required for employment and job retention to include communicating effectively, conveying professionalism, promoting teamwork and collaboration, and thinking critically and solving problems.

All four assessments are designed in accordance with the nationally *accepted Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* developed by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. To support use of the assessments as indicators of foundational skill readiness for career education/training program placement, industry certification, apprenticeship and/or employment, the assessments are further designed in accordance with the *Uniform Guidelines for Employee Selection Procedures* adopted by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Civil Service Commission, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Justice.

All four assessments are criterion-referenced against absolute standards for performance, and therefore, measure mastery of specific learning objectives rather than comparing an individual's scores to the performance of other test takers.

## **WIN alignment to the original ACT WorkKeys®**

The three WIN Ready to Work Assessments (Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Locating Information) that will be used by the State of South Carolina going forward are fully aligned and comparable to the original ACT WorkKeys® assessments previously used by the state.

WIN was the first and longest continuous instructional provider chosen by ACT® to participate in its WorkKeys® Partners Program in the late 1990s. Up until ACT® discontinued its partners program in 2010, WIN had administered more ACT WorkKeys® assessments and profiled more jobs than any other single entity in the country. Today, WIN continues to champion implementation of solutions around the ACT WorkKeys® System and the ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate® (NCRC) in states including Oregon, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, and North Carolina.

The WIN Ready to Work courseware was originally and continues to be directly aligned to the skill sets of the original ACT WorkKeys® System, teaching what is measured on the original ACT WorkKeys® assessments (including, but not limited to, Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Locating Information). The organization of the courseware content is a direct match to the organizational structure (content categories and levels) of the ACT WorkKeys® assessments, the ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate® (NCRC), and numerous aligned state-branded career readiness certificates/credentials.

## WIN alignment to the new ACT WorkKeys®

Based on preliminary research and analysis, the three WIN Ready to Work Assessments (Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information) are fundamentally aligned and largely comparable to the new ACT WorkKeys® assessments (Applied Math, Workplace Documents and Graphic Literacy). In fact, at Levels 3 and 4, which represent the entry skill levels for the majority of the jobs profiled in South Carolina, there is no significant difference in how these skill levels are defined.

For example, at Level 3 on both the WIN Ready to Work Applied Mathematics Assessment and the new ACT WorkKeys® Applied Math Assessment, examinees must demonstrate the ability to solve problems that require a single type of mathematics operation (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) using whole numbers; add or subtract negative numbers, and/or change numbers from one form to another using whole numbers, fractions, decimals, or percentages. Likewise, at Level 4, the examinee must solve problems that require one or two operations, multiply negative numbers, calculate averages, simple ratios, simple proportions, or rates using whole numbers and decimals.

The same is true for the WIN Ready to Work Reading for Information Assessment and the new ACT WorkKeys® counterpart Workplace Documents. At Level 3 of both assessments, examinees identify main ideas and clearly stated details, choose the correct meaning of a word that is clearly defined, and choose the correct meaning of common, everyday workplace words. At Level 4, examinees identify important details that may not be clearly stated, use the reading material to figure out the meaning of words that are not identified, apply instructions with several steps, choose when to perform a step in a series of steps, and may have to choose what to do when changing conditions call for a different action, i.e., an “if-then” situation.

Levels 3 and 4 of the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment compare favorably to the new ACT WorkKeys® Graphic Literacy assessment. At Level 3 of the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment, examinees are tasked with finding one or two pieces of information in a graphic and/or filling in one or two pieces of information that are missing from a graphic. At Level 3 of the new ACT WorkKeys® Graphic Literacy assessment, examinees are tasked with locating and finding information and/or identifying the next step in the process. At Level 4 of the WIN assessment, the task is to find several pieces of information in one or two graphics, summarize information from one or two straightforward graphics, and/or identify trends shown in one of two straightforward graphics. At Level 4, the ACT WorkKeys® Graphic Literacy assessment objectives parallel the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment.

The complexity of graphics associated with Level 3 of the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment meet the new criteria for the ACT WorkKeys® Graphic Literacy assessment. The Level 3 WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment already includes graphs with two axes (x-and y-axis) and flowcharts, both of which are new to Graphic Literacy.

The only substantive differences between the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment and the ACT WorkKeys® Graphic Literacy assessment is seen at Levels 5 and 6. There are no graphics in the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment that meet the criteria for the most complex graphics. For instance, at Level 5, 17% of the new Graphic Literacy objectives (2 out of 12) are associated with “difficult” graphics and at Level 6, 50% of the objectives (5 out of 10) are associated with “difficult” graphics. WIN is currently exploring employer demand for adding more “difficult” graphics to Levels 5 and 6 of the WIN Ready to Work Locating Information Assessment as well as adding a Level 7.

## The ‘new’ South Carolina career readiness certificate/s

There have been approximately 430,000 National Career Readiness Certificates® (NCRC) earned in South Carolina since its inception. According to the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Workforce because the NCRC® brand is owned by ACT®, with the transition to the WIN solution, the state will introduce a new official state-sponsored career readiness certificate or potentially two separate certificates (one demonstrating foundational skills and the other demonstrating soft skills; the format for the new state-sponsored certificate/s is still being discussed) signed by the Governor of South Carolina. Like the current WorkReady SC Career Readiness Certificate and the South Carolina issued ACT WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificates®, the new certificate/s may be used as an indicator of readiness for post-secondary education, on-the-job training, apprenticeship and/or employment.

All previous ACT WorkKeys® assessments, South Carolina issued NCRC®, and South Carolina job profile data were paid for and therefore are owned by the State of South Carolina. This data will be transitioned to the State of South Carolina and made accessible to employers and other program implementation partners by the state. As a result, employers can continue to recognize and accept the NCRC® and the new South Carolina career readiness certificate based on the WIN Ready to Work assessments (yet to be officially named) as equivalents.

With this transition, South Carolina will join other states that use the WIN Ready to Work Assessments as the qualifying assessments for state-branded career readiness credentials/certificates including Florida, Arizona and Kentucky.

## WIN and ACT WorkKeys® job profiling

Employers in South Carolina use ACT WorkKeys® profiling skill area and skill level recommendations to make employment decisions, i.e., recruitment selection, training, promotion. So, it is reasonable for employers to wonder how the introduction of the WIN assessments and a new state-sponsored certificate/s could affect a company’s existing profiling.

The answer is, it doesn’t. A WorkKeys Content Validity Report (CVR) recommending ACT WorkKeys® Applied Math, Locating Information/Graphic Literacy, and Reading for Information/Workplace Documents does not affect the utilization of the corresponding assessments now or in the future.

The profiling process is used to determine two fundamental things: 1) What skill areas are required to perform the job tasks; and 2) What skill levels are required for each skill area for entry into the job being profiled.

The entrance of the WIN Ready to Work Assessments is best described as another tool in the toolbox for employment, economic development and postsecondary education decision making.

The alignment of the WIN Ready to Work assessments to the original and the new ACT WorkKeys® assessment objectives is discussed at length in an earlier section of this paper, so it is not repeated here. But it is important to reiterate that we are confident these two assessment tools can co-exist and add value for South Carolina employers and stakeholders.

When making the decision to replace the Applied Mathematics (Applied Math), Reading for Information (Workplace Documents), and Locating Information (Graphic Literacy) assessments in late 2016, ACT® provided guidance for transitioning profile recommendations. The transition from the existing to the new assessments was relatively straightforward. If any of the “big 3”

assessments were being used, a series of questions were recommended to determine next steps. With all three assessments, the process is fairly benign:

- Applied Mathematics (Levels 3-4): Employer receives a memo stating that this assessment is a name change only. For Levels 5-7, it is recommended that the profiler review the CVR with the employer to determine if the level previously set should be re-evaluated.
- Reading for Information (All Levels): Employer receives a memo stating that this assessment is a name change only.
- Locating Information (All Levels): This skill should be profiled again using the existing task list to determine if any substantive changes result in a skill level change, i.e., higher or lower skill level. A Graphic Literacy addendum report is issued to attach to the existing profile.

The guidance laid out by ACT® for transitioning to the new ACT WorkKeys® assessments can be used to enable an employer to utilize either the WIN Ready to Work Assessments (Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, Locating Information), the ACT WorkKeys® assessments (Applied Math, Workplace Documents, Graphic Literacy) or some combination of both. Going forward, we recommend that South Carolina job profilers include an addendum to the CVR establishing how the WIN Ready to Work Assessments equally measure the skills profiled.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul L. Connerty, MPA, is an experienced workforce development professional and training consultant with South Carolina based KC Associates, LLC. Mr. Connerty is a 14-year veteran and former ACT WorkKeys® authorized job profiler, conducting job profiles for companies large and small including international brands like Volvo Car US Operations, Robert Bosch, LLC, Wayne Brothers, Inc., and Lincoln Electric.

A career workforce development professional, Mr. Connerty retired from public service in 2011 as executive director of the South Carolina Trident Workforce Investment Board, where he championed workforce initiatives in Charleston and surrounding counties for more than 25 years.

Mr. Connerty earned his bachelor's degree in science from Henderson State University, Arkansas, and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Alaska-Anchorage, School of Public Affairs and Policy Studies. He also attended graduate school at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia; completed the National Judicial College Administrative Law Practitioners Program at the University of Nevada-Reno, in 1984; and is a 2005 graduate of The Institute, a leading economic development program sponsored by the South Carolina Economic Developers' Association and the South Carolina Department of Commerce.

## ABOUT THIS WHITE PAPER | VERSION APRIL 4, 2018

This first version white paper will be periodically updated as the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce continue to collaborate with their implementation partners and South Carolina employers about the new direction and structure of the South Carolina WIN career readiness solution.