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Exam tests students' skills, not memories

Career, college assessment compares skills in 9th and 12th grades

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Usually when students sit down to take a standardized test, they do so with a pencil and a brain overflowing with facts, figures and theories.

But for Lakeview Academy freshmen, their newest standardized test required something a little different.

"It wasn't like any test I'd ever taken before," said Anna Beavers, 14. "It wasn't regurgitating things you learned. It gave us situations that we'll encounter in jobs when we're older."

The College and Work Readiness Assessment, administered Friday and Monday, measured analytic reasoning and evaluation, writing effectiveness, writing mechanics and problem-solving skills. The assessment will be re-administered to seniors every spring to compare how these skills grew over their four years in school, said Connie White, director of technology and learning at Lakeview.

"This particular assessment is different than most because students can't memorize content. These are really the things that contribute to long-term success," White said.

Unlike traditional standardized tests, the College and Work Readiness Assessment puts students in the place of teachers, business owners and community leaders and asks them to make decisions. Students have 90 minutes to complete the multiple parts of one problem.

"We need to be testing for higher order skills," Head of School John Kennedy said. "It's going to help our teachers challenge kids at their highest level."

Lakeview lower school students take the Educational Records Bureau test for independent schools, and students in the upper school take the SAT and the PSAT. This is the first time the school has administered this assessment.

Students took the test online using laptops or computerized tablets, another difference from a pencil-and-paper test.

"It is cutting-edge ... It lets the children take control of their learning," White said.

"We've been using the technology as a teaching strategy for years. This is just the next area for growth."

In addition to administering the assessment, Lakeview classes will implement more project-based learning to help students practice solving problems.

One potential question on the assessment had students analyze whether an airplane is a good investment for their business' sales team after learning the model in question was in a crash recently. They were given background information on the airplane, the crash, business communication and several other documents from which they had to discern the risk and benefits of purchasing the plane.

Beavers and Marcelle Zavala, 14, both had a question putting them in the shoes of museum curators. They gave their opinions on different works of art and where they fit in the museum, a problem that involved both aesthetics and technology.

"We had to use our analytical skills to assess a problem, but not in a typical way," Zavala said. "I thought it was way easier and way better (than a traditional test). If you get a lot wrong on a multiple-choice test, it seems like you're not smart. This shows your mind works."

Between 80 and 100 high schools nationally give the assessment. White said it will serve to help students on their high school transcripts to apply to college and also give them experience for their futures.

"The great thing about it is it's a meaningful problem ... They're transferring their learning to new situations," White said. "It's like driving a car. You may read about how to drive a car but you don't actually learn until you're in a car."

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