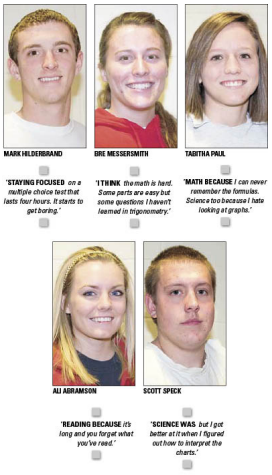

Admission, placement test 50 years old.

It's not a lot of fun to sit for four hours and take a test on a Saturday morning.

But that's the name of the game for many juniors and seniors at Gothenburg High School and other schools throughout the nation who sign up for the ACT to gain admission into colleges and universities and enhance opportunities for academic scholarships.

And taking the test isn't usually a one-time shot.

GHS senior Mark Hilderbrand has taken it six or seven times, counting his seventh-grade year when he qualified and was invited to take the ACT through Duke University's Talent Identification Program.

Other seniors interviewed about frequency of taking the test include: Bre Messersmith, four; Tabitha Paul and Ali Abramson, three; and Scott Speck, 5.

GHS guidance counselor Jerry Wiggins recommends that students take the ACT four times to boost scores for college admission and improve chances of earning scholarships.

“I think the more a person takes it, the more comfortable they are,” Wiggins said.

On average, he estimates that about 70% of GHS seniors will have taken the ACT at some point and that about 50% of the junior class have.

Although the test is available to students grades nine through 12, Wiggins said he doesn’t formally discuss the test until the fall of a student’s junior year.

Then he talks about the importance of taking the ACT, how to register for it, how many times it should be taken and other things. Students also receive an ACT booklet with sample questions.

In addition to measuring a student’s ability to do college-level work, Wiggins said some scholarships are based primarily on ACT test scores.

For example, Wiggins points to a renewable scholarship offered at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Students who earn a 23 on the ACT and are in the top 30% of their graduating class are eligible for a dean’s scholarship which is $500 a year or $2,000 for four years.

Improving that score three points—to 26—can mean a chancellor’s scholarship which is half the cost of tuition if students are in the top 25% of their graduating class.

With an ACT score of 29 and a rank in the top 10% of their class could insure a regent’s scholarship which is full tuition, or about $5,000 annually.

ACT—THEN & NOW

The first American College Testing Program was administered on Nov. 7, 1959, to approximately 75,000 college-bound high school students in 18 states.

It was organized during a meeting in August of 1959 in Iowa City, IA, to respond to a need seen for a national standardized achievement test that would help colleges make accurate admission and course placement decisions for students with a broad range of skills. Following is a comparison of the ACT early years and now.

- Registration fee for the ACT—then, $3; now, $32.
- Number of employees—then, six; now, approximately 1,500.
- Company name—then, the American College Testing Program; now, ACT, Inc.
- Number of states with ACT test centers—then, 18; now, 50-plus (plus more than 120 foreign countries).
- Number of colleges accepting ACT scores—then, 368; now, all major four-year colleges and universities across the country.
- Number of annual test dates—then, 3; now, six.

(Source: ACT.com)

ACT COMPOSITE

Years	National average	State average	Dist. 20 average
2004-05	20.90	21.80	22.70
2005-06	21.10	21.90	22.00
2006-07	21.20	22.10	20.50
2007-08	21.10	22.10	21.60
2008-90	21.10	22.10	22.00