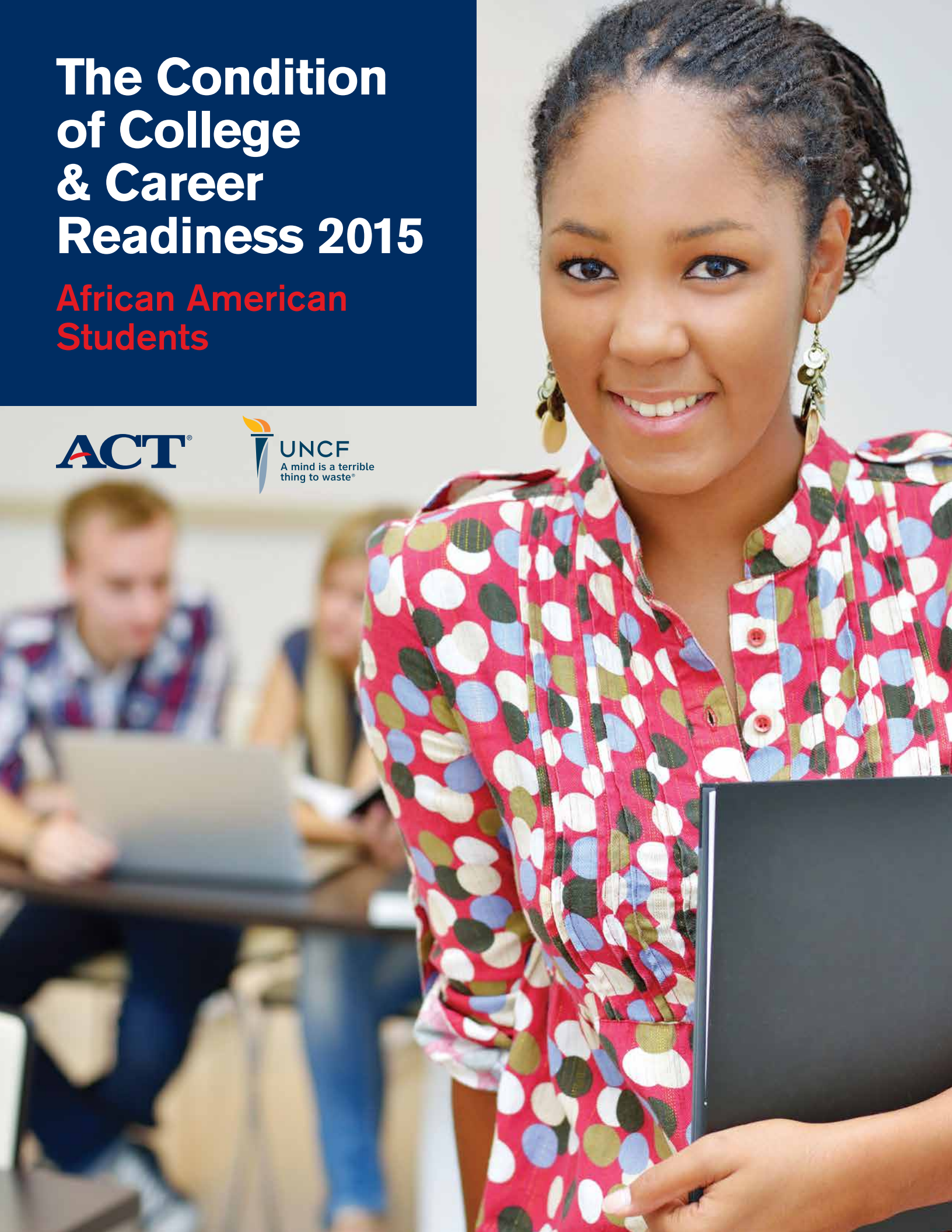


# The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015

## African American Students

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>





Dear Colleague,

ACT and UNCF (United Negro College Fund) share a mission to successfully get students to and through college so they will be prepared to pursue a career path of their choice. We also share a commitment to the effective use of data and analysis to support the continuous improvement of this important process.

As such, ACT and UNCF are proud to once again collaborate on this report, which is an extension of the annual *Condition of College & Career Readiness* series from ACT. This report provides a national snapshot of academic performance among African American students in the 2015 high school graduating class who took the ACT® test and addresses questions of critical importance to our nation. Are African American high school students adequately prepared for college and career? Are younger African American students receiving rigorous instruction in the early grades necessary to prepare them for college preparatory courses? Are enough African American students taking core courses that will prepare them for college and career. Are their schools offering these needed courses? And are African American students who *are* ready for college and career actually succeeding?

There's one thing we do know: African American parents overwhelmingly want their children to succeed academically, putting them on a path to earn a college degree. UNCF research shows that almost 90% of low- and moderate-income African American parents want their children to earn a college degree, and a recent Pew Research Center Survey shows that African American and Hispanic parents are significantly more likely than white parents to say it's essential that their children earn a college degree. The Pew survey also notes that high school dropout rates have decreased for African Americans ages 18 to 24, from 16% in 1993 down to 7% in 2014. Additionally, college enrollment among African Americans has increased during this same time period and same age group, from 897,000 to 1.5 million.

This is all good news. However, significant gaps persist between current levels of achievement and the more equitable levels of college and career readiness that are needed. America is faced with classrooms that are trending majority-minority, but the teachers don't reflect this: fewer than 20% of public school teachers identify as people of color, contrasted with nearly half of public school students, according to the Center for American Progress. Rigorous coursework isn't readily available in all communities—particularly communities of color. Combine these elements and you have the perfect storm of African American students not being prepared for the demands of college.

Progress will require that we look to the evidence of what works for African American students. To that end, this report offers several recommendations for improving readiness for African-American students and all students. Some of these recommendations include:

- investing in high-quality early childhood education
- establishing clear, high, and common academic standards in the classroom
- collecting more data that provide a true reflection of students' educational experiences
- addressing disproportionate discipline for African American students that reduces class time and further hinders college readiness
- investing in a culturally competent and diverse teacher force
- promoting rigorous exposure and engagement in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields early in students' academic experiences.

Particularly alarming to both ACT and UNCF is that among all racial groups, African Americans are least likely to meet benchmarks in math and science. This may, in turn, deter students from pursuing STEM-related majors and embarking upon careers in this field, which are the ever-growing and highest-paying careers of the 21st century, but that also consistently lack diversity.

ACT and UNCF worked together to share this data report with you, and it is our hope to work with you to increase college and career readiness among African American students, so that they are prepared for success on their educational pathways after high school. We hope that this report will assist parents, states, districts, schools, and educators who play such important and interdependent roles in preparing African American students, and all students, to thrive in education, career and life.



**Marten Roorda**  
CEO, ACT



**Michael L. Lomax, PhD**  
President and CEO, UNCF

# African American Students

## The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015

*The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015* is the ACT annual report on the progress of US high school graduates relative to college readiness. This year's report shows that 59% of students in the 2015 US graduating class took the ACT® test, up from 57% last year and 49% in 2011. The increased number of test takers over the past several years enhances the breadth and depth of the data pool, providing a comprehensive picture of the current graduating class in the context of college readiness as well as offering a glimpse at the emerging educational pipeline.

### *The ACT: Now More Than Ever*

ACT has a longstanding commitment to improving college and career readiness. Through our research, our thought leadership, and our solutions, we seek to raise awareness of issues and best practices aimed at helping individuals achieve education and workplace success. As the landscape of education and assessment rapidly shifts and state education and economic development agendas converge, ACT is uniquely positioned to inform decisions at the individual, institutional, system, and agency levels.

As a research-based nonprofit organization, ACT is committed to providing information and solutions to support the following:

- **Holistic View of Readiness.** Our research shows that the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards can help prepare students for college and career success. However, we understand that academic readiness is just one of several factors that contribute to educational success. One 2014 ACT report, *Broadening the Definition of College and Career Readiness: A Holistic Approach*, shows academic readiness—long the sole focus of monitoring college readiness—as one of four critical domains in determining an individual's readiness for success in college and career. Crosscutting skills, behavioral skills, and the ability to navigate future pathways are also important factors to measure and address. Together, these elements define a clear picture of student readiness for postsecondary education. To encourage progress, the educational system needs to monitor and sustain all key factors of success.
- **Stability and Validity of Data.** ACT is committed to maintaining the integrity and credibility of the 1–36 score scale, a scale that is familiar to and valued by the many stakeholders served by ACT. Leveraging the power of longitudinal data means avoiding dramatic shifts in the reporting structure.
- **Promoting Access.** Serving the needs of our many stakeholders is a focal point for ACT. We will continue to explore ways to expand college access for all students, promoting initiatives to better meet the needs of underserved learners and developing solutions and

services that make a difference in the lives of those we serve. Through new avenues such as online testing, initiating campaigns targeted at underserved students, and supporting organizations aligned with our mission, ACT is working to reach and help a greater number of individuals.

- **Continuous Improvement Without the Need for Radical Change.** ACT is committed to providing a wider range of solutions, across a broader span of life's decision points, in an increasingly individualized manner so that all can benefit. This has led us to a mode of continuous improvement. However, our goal is to avoid radical change so as to assist our users with transition. Our research agenda takes into account the changes in education and workplace practice and the demographics and evolving needs of those we serve. Accordingly, when research and evidence dictate, we will continue to make necessary changes in our recommendations and/or solutions, including discontinuing outdated programs and services, to bring clarity to the market.
- **Providing Meaningful Data for Better Decisions.** ACT is focused on providing better data to students, parents, schools, districts, and states so that *all* can make more informed decisions to improve outcomes. We accomplish this goal by taking a holistic view and using consistent and reliable historical information, so that individuals and institutions have a better context to make critical decisions about the journey they have undertaken.

### *Using This Report<sup>1</sup>*

This report is designed to help educators understand and answer the following questions:

- Are your students graduating from high school prepared for college and career?
- Are enough of your students taking core courses necessary to be prepared for success, and are those courses rigorous enough?
- What are the most popular majors/occupations, and what does the pipeline for each look like?
- What other dimensions of college and career readiness, outside of academic readiness, should educators measure and track?

We sincerely hope this report will serve as a call to action—or even as a wake-up call—that our nation's current policies and practices are not having the desired effect of increasing the college and career readiness levels of US high school graduates. We remain committed to providing more and better data so individuals and institutions can make better-informed decisions leading to the improved educational outcomes we all desire and help more individuals achieve education and workplace success.

# Key Findings

## The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015— African American Students

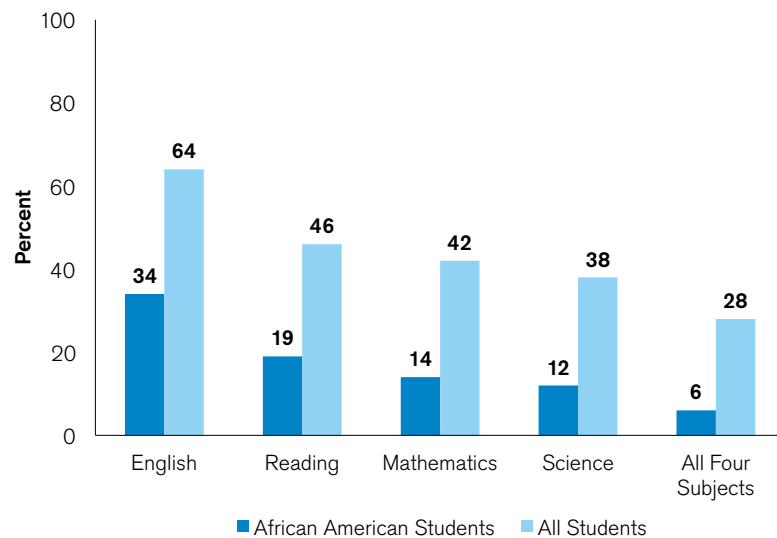
Key Findings	Implications	Recommendations
<p><b>College readiness among African American students.</b> Despite a small gain from 2014, the percentage of African American students meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks is very low compared to other students (pp. 6–8).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research demonstrates that academic gaps begin before high school. Without solid academic foundations established in primary and secondary school, African American students will continue to be academically underprepared for college in large numbers.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• When students are not adequately prepared on the K–12 level, they are more likely to need remedial or developmental courses in college, which offer no course credit, yet students often have to pay for these classes. This leads to longer completion times and the need for additional financial aid, both factors that contribute to higher rates of attrition. Unfortunately, research demonstrates that African American students are more likely to need remedial courses than other students and also have significant financial need for higher education compared to other students.<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because these achievement gaps begin early, it is imperative that states invest in high-quality early childhood education.</li> <li>• Invest in early warning systems that can provide prompt feedback to students for proper course corrections.</li> <li>• The secondary-to-postsecondary transition can be particularly challenging for African American students. Preventing “summer melt” requires approaches such as summer bridge programs, adequate advising, and innovative communication techniques such as texting, to help guide and support students academically, socially, and financially.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Core course-taking patterns and readiness.</b> African American students who take the recommended core curriculum are more likely to be college ready. However, African American students who take core or more courses are still less likely to meet Benchmarks than all other students (p. 10).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleges and universities consider high school course-taking patterns as an important factor in admissions decisions, among other issues.</li> <li>• African American students are more likely to be in schools that offer less rigorous courses, which can hamper the college admissions process.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Guidance counselors play a significant role in helping students choose the right courses for graduation; however, some schools with fewer personnel resources may have high counselor-to-student ratios which hinders intrusive and effective advising.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts must be made at the state and local levels to ensure that not only are the right courses available, but that they are sufficiently rigorous and aligned to postsecondary expectations.</li> <li>• Schools should make the necessary investments to increase the number of guidance counselors that can help students identify the correct courses that put them on track to graduate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Academic performance in STEM-related subjects.</b> Among all racial groups, African American students are least likely to meet Benchmarks in math and science. In fact, white students are four times more likely to meet science Benchmarks than African American students (p. 10).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor performance in STEM-related subjects may deter students from pursuing science- or math-related majors and embarking on careers in STEM fields.</li> <li>• STEM fields are driving the economy of tomorrow and a continued underrepresentation of African American students in the field could have long-lasting impacts on the African American community and the country at large.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote rigorous exposure and engagement in STEM activities and fields early on in students’ academic experiences.</li> <li>• The US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights data snapshot reveals that only 57% of African American students attend high schools that have access to the full range of math and science courses (Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus, biology, chemistry, physics), compared to 71% of white students.<sup>6</sup> In order to foster engagement and interest in STEM majors and careers, <i>all</i> high schools should invest in providing high-quality math and science offerings for students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Postsecondary aspirations.</b> Nearly 85% of African American students aspire to obtain a postsecondary degree. While there are wide achievement gaps among student groups, the desire for a credential beyond high school is paramount for all students (p. 14).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clear gap between college aspirations and readiness outcomes for African American students. This is especially troubling given the proliferation of careers that require a postsecondary degree.</li> <li>• Extant research from UNCF shows that African American parents and community members overwhelmingly want African American students to obtain a postsecondary education as well.<sup>7</sup> Any effort to increase readiness among these students should include those voices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote a college-going culture among students at an early age.</li> <li>• Invest in highly trained counselors that can help students navigate the college-going process, including institutional fit and financial opportunities.</li> <li>• Promote school tours and camps at local colleges to expose students to the postsecondary experience.</li> </ul>

# African American Students

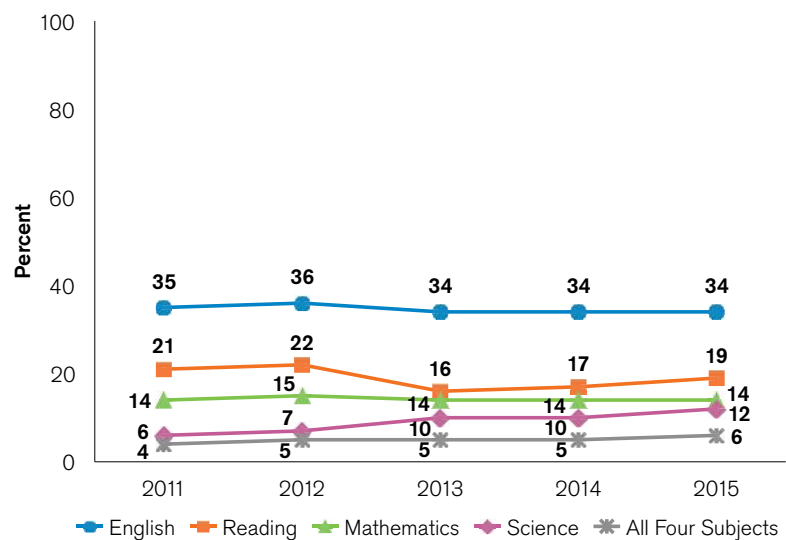
## Attainment of College and Career Readiness

- 252,566 African American high school 2015 graduates took the ACT.
- From 2011–2015, the number of ACT test-taking African American graduates has increased by about 13%. While this is good news, African American students continue to lag behind those from other racial groups in meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks.

Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Subject



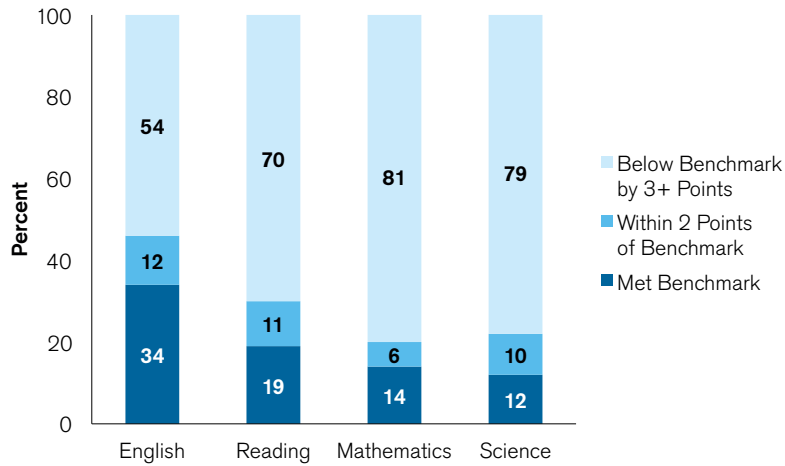
Percent of 2011–2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks



Note: Percents in this report may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

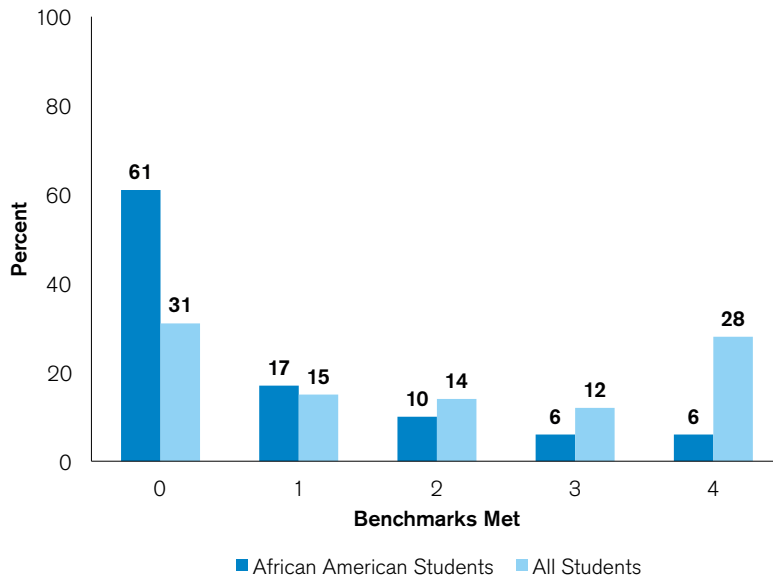
## Near Attainment of College and Career Readiness

Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates by ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment and Subject



African American students are most likely to meet the English ACT College Readiness Benchmark and less likely to meet the Benchmarks in reading, mathematics, and science. This pattern is consistent across all student groups.

Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates by Number of ACT College Readiness Benchmarks Attained



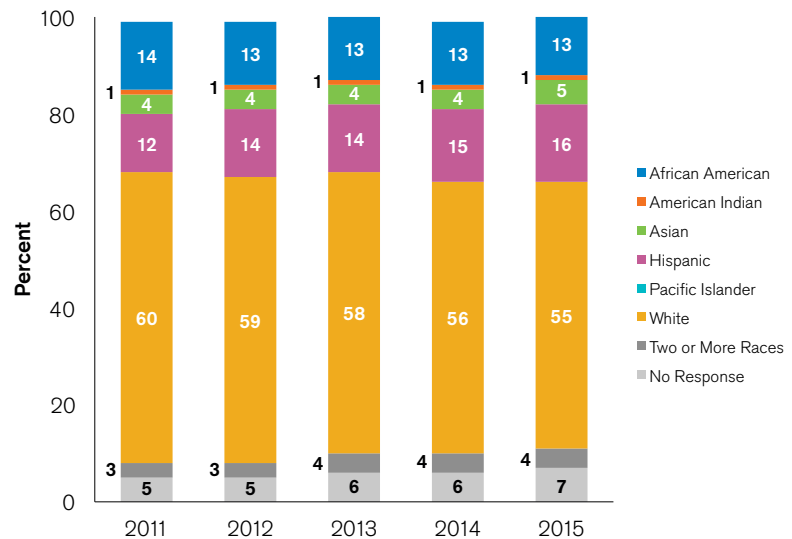
Compared to all students, African American students are twice as likely to meet zero ACT College Readiness Benchmarks.

# African American Students

## Participation and Opportunity

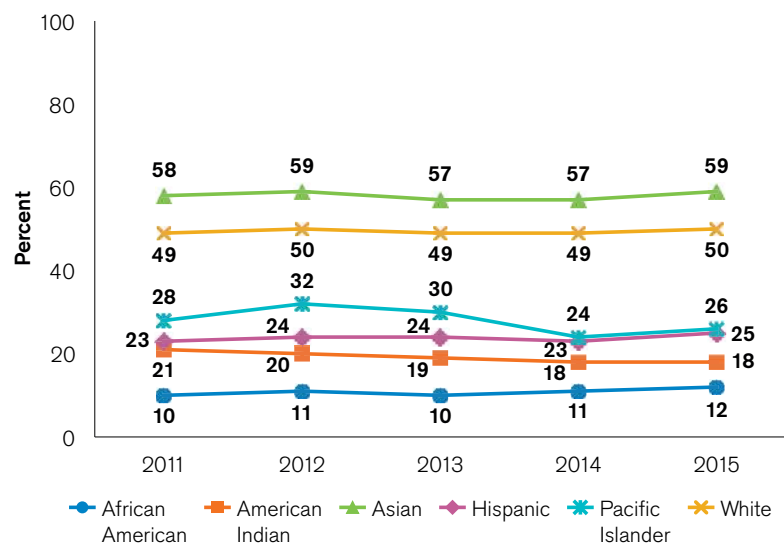
Over the past decade, ACT has experienced unprecedented growth in the number of students tested, as well as statewide partnerships in 14 states and in many districts across the country. As a result, the 2015 *Condition of College & Career Readiness* report provides a much deeper and more representative sample in comparison to a purely self-selected college-going population.

**Percent of 2011–2015 ACT-Tested High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity\***



Note: Values less than 0.5% will not appear.

**Percent of 2011–2015 ACT-Tested High School Graduates Meeting Three or More Benchmarks by Race/Ethnicity\***



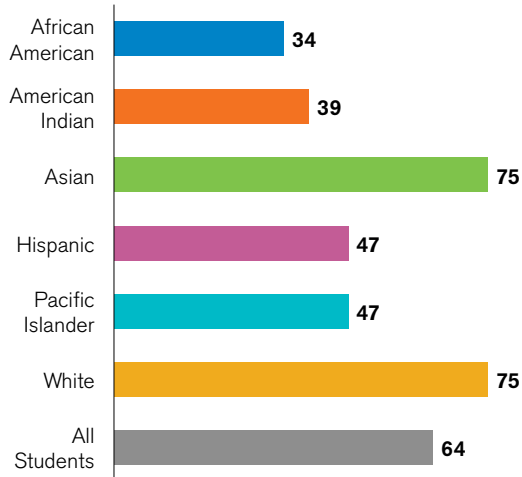
\* Race/ethnicity categories changed in 2011 to reflect updated US Department of Education reporting requirements.<sup>8</sup>



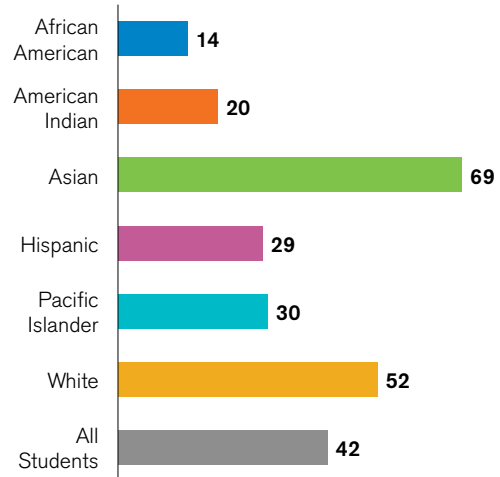
# Participation and Opportunity by Subject

Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested High School Graduates Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Race/Ethnicity and Subject\*

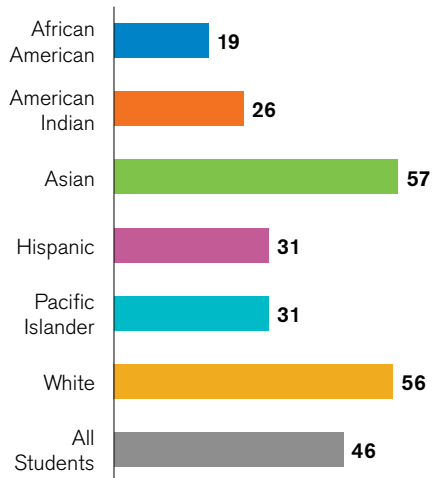
## English



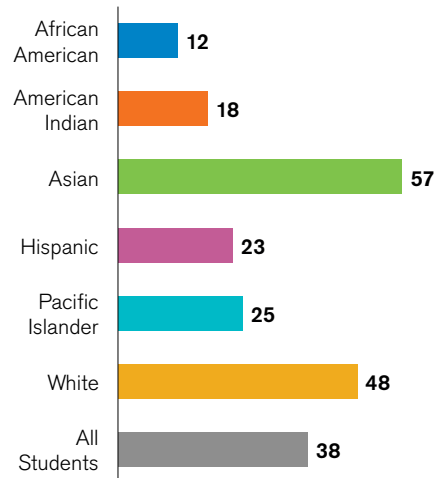
## Mathematics



## Reading



## Science



African American	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	All Students
N = 252,566	N = 14,711	N = 87,499	N = 299,920	N = 6,090	N = 1,057,803	N = 1,924,436

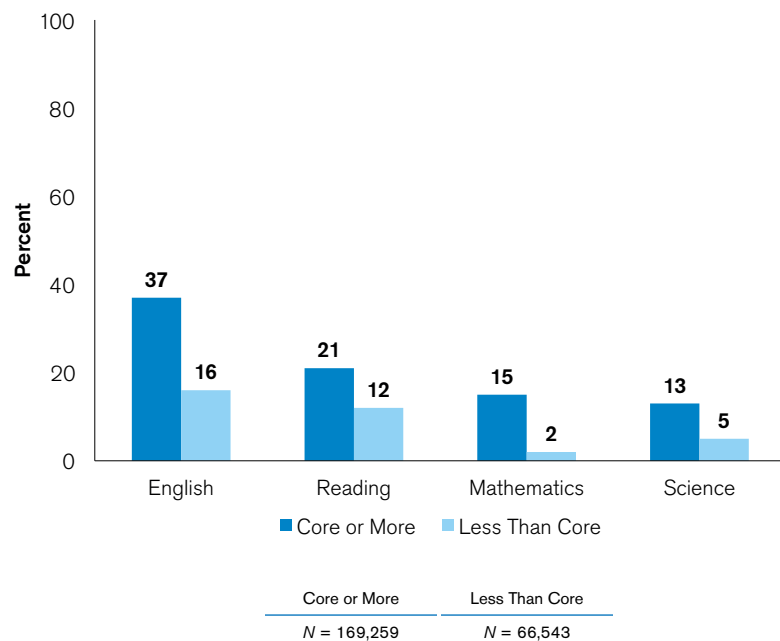
\* Race/ethnicity categories changed in 2011 to reflect updated US Department of Education reporting requirements.<sup>8</sup>

# African American Students

## Course-Taking Patterns and Benchmark Performance

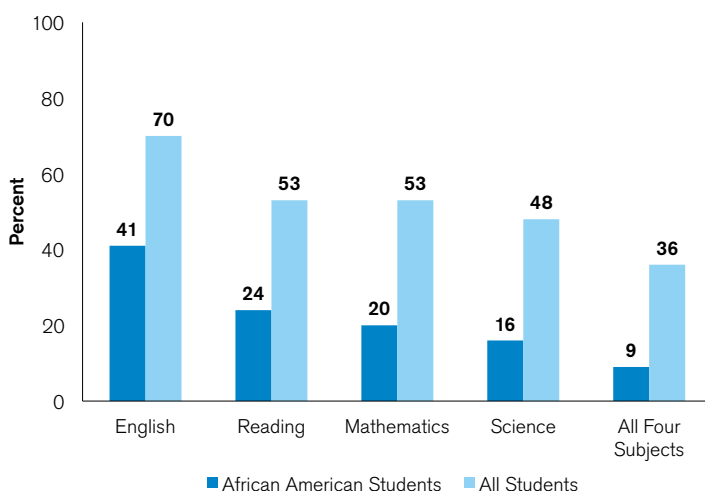
Within subjects, ACT has consistently found that students who take the recommended core curriculum are more likely to be ready for college or career than those who do not. A core curriculum is defined as four years of English and three years each of mathematics, social studies, and science.<sup>9</sup>

**Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates in Core or More vs. Less Than Core Courses Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Subject**



## A Look at STEM

**Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates with an Interest in STEM Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Subject (*N* = 86,451)**

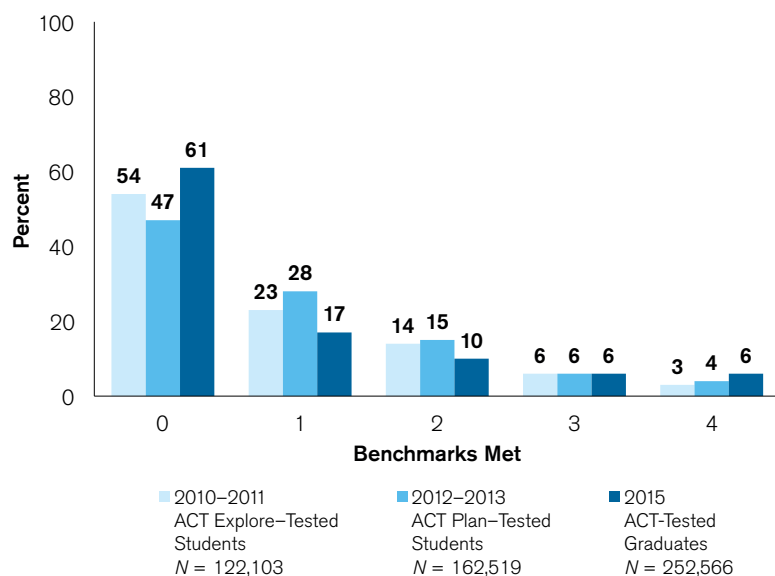


This chart compares ACT College Readiness Benchmark attainment for 2015 African American high school graduates nationwide who have an interest in STEM majors or occupations to STEM-interested graduates nationally. Students interested in STEM were more likely to meet the mathematics or science Benchmarks than all students, when interest isn't considered (p. 6). Characteristics of students with an interest in STEM were addressed in greater depth in the *Condition of STEM 2014* report.

## Early Preparation

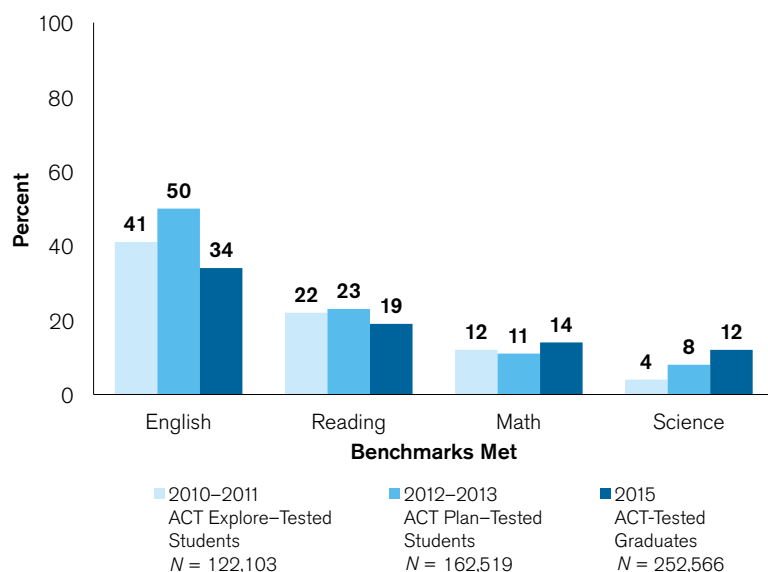
ACT research shows that younger students who take rigorous curricula are more prepared to graduate from high school ready for college or career. Moreover, our research (*The Forgotten Middle*, 2008) found that “the level of academic achievement that students attain by 8th grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school!”

**Percent of African American Students Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks at Three Stages of Academic Development**



In past *Condition* reports, ACT Explore®, ACT Plan®, and ACT results all reflected data from students testing or graduating in the current year. This year, ACT Explore (8th grade) and ACT Plan (10th grade) results reflect 2015 graduating class examinees (both tested and not tested with the ACT) when they were assessed in 8th and 10th grades. The goal of this change is to describe the condition of college and career readiness for this year’s graduates and their counterparts as they progressed from 8th grade to 10th grade and through graduation.

**Percent of African American Students Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks by Content Area at Three Stages of Academic Development**



# African American Students

## ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment for Top Planned College Majors: 2015 Graduates

When students register for the ACT, they can select a college major—from a list of 294 majors—that they plan to pursue in college. Among recent ACT-tested high school graduates nationwide, about 80% selected a specific planned major, whereas about 20% indicated that they were undecided or did not select a major.

This table ranks the top (most frequently selected) majors among 2015 graduates. The percentages of students meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are shown for each major. Across these planned majors, there are considerable differences in the percentage of students who are ready to succeed in college.

Major Name	N	English	Reading	Math	Science	All Four
<b>Undecided</b>	25,394	31	19	13	11	6
<b>No Major Indicated</b>	23,607	14	6	4	4	2
<b>Nursing, Registered (BS/RN)</b>	13,999	31	15	8	7	2
<b>Medicine (Pre-Medicine)</b>	9,044	62	40	32	28	18
<b>Business Administration and Management, General</b>	8,885	32	18	13	11	5
<b>Law (Pre-Law)</b>	5,492	40	24	15	12	7
<b>Criminology</b>	4,594	29	16	8	8	3
<b>Athletic Training</b>	4,142	30	16	10	9	3
<b>Biology, General</b>	4,032	58	36	29	25	16
<b>Mechanical Engineering</b>	4,012	36	20	22	17	10
<b>Psychology, Clinical and Counseling</b>	3,793	51	30	16	15	8
<b>Physical Therapy (Pre-Physical Therapy)</b>	3,698	39	20	14	12	5
<b>Accounting</b>	3,548	38	19	21	14	7
<b>Medical Assisting</b>	3,232	22	11	5	5	1
<b>Hospital/Facilities Administration</b>	2,781	23	12	6	5	2
<b>Physical Therapy Assisting</b>	2,568	22	11	7	5	2
<b>Nursing, Practical/Vocational (LPN)</b>	2,567	22	9	5	5	2
<b>Music, Performance</b>	2,473	32	16	9	8	4
<b>Computer Science and Programming</b>	2,410	52	34	31	27	17
<b>Graphic Design</b>	2,293	33	17	10	10	4
<b>Pharmacy (Pre-Pharmacy)</b>	2,293	51	27	23	17	9
<b>Marketing Management and Research</b>	2,232	40	23	16	13	7
<b>Computer Engineering</b>	2,209	41	23	26	19	11
<b>Psychology, General</b>	2,193	54	34	19	18	10
<b>Music, General</b>	2,104	27	12	9	7	4
<b>Engineering (Pre-Engineering), General</b>	1,998	41	23	28	22	12
<b>Biochemistry and Biophysics</b>	1,955	59	37	34	27	18
<b>Small Business Management/Operations</b>	1,876	24	13	8	6	3
<b>Theatre Arts/Drama</b>	1,856	40	22	11	10	6
<b>Electrical, Electronics and Comm. Engineering</b>	1,738	37	20	24	17	10

Note: *Undecided* and/or *No Major Indicated* are included in the table, if applicable. The former refers to students who selected the option *Undecided* from the list of majors. The latter refers to students who did not respond to the question.

## ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment for the Top Planned College Majors with Good Fit: 2015 Graduates

Many students gravitate toward majors that align with their preferred activities and values. ACT research has shown that greater *interest-major fit* is related to important student outcomes such as persistence in a major or college. This table shows, for each planned major, the numbers and percentages of students displaying good interest-major fit<sup>10</sup>, as well as the percentages of students meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. Since only students who completed the ACT Interest Inventory during ACT registration are included here, this table shows results for a subset of the students in the prior table. These planned majors vary considerably in the percentage of students displaying good interest-major fit and meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. The results highlight the importance of examining multiple predictors of college success and affirm the value of a holistic view of college readiness.

Major Name	N Fit	% Fit	English	Reading	Math	Science	All Four
<b>Undecided</b>			No profile available				
<b>No Major Indicated</b>			No profile available				
<b>Nursing, Registered (BS/RN)</b>	2,880	21	39	19	9	9	3
<b>Medicine (Pre-Medicine)</b>	2,979	33	69	46	36	33	22
<b>Business Administration and Management, General</b>	2,764	31	39	22	16	13	7
<b>Law (Pre-Law)</b>	1,796	33	51	31	17	15	7
<b>Criminology</b>	610	13	41	26	9	11	4
<b>Athletic Training</b>	499	12	39	20	12	9	4
<b>Biology, General</b>	1,407	35	64	40	32	28	18
<b>Mechanical Engineering</b>	903	23	39	22	24	20	12
<b>Psychology, Clinical and Counseling</b>	460	12	66	44	20	18	11
<b>Physical Therapy (Pre-Physical Therapy)</b>	581	16	48	26	19	16	8
<b>Accounting</b>	1,705	48	42	22	24	16	8
<b>Medical Assisting</b>	406	13	26	15	8	7	2
<b>Hospital/Facilities Administration</b>	668	24	22	13	6	5	2
<b>Physical Therapy Assisting</b>	241	9	27	16	9	8	2
<b>Nursing, Practical/Vocational (LPN)</b>	360	14	29	9	4	5	2
<b>Music, Performance</b>	783	32	42	22	12	10	5
<b>Computer Science and Programming</b>	471	20	52	39	34	32	23
<b>Graphic Design</b>	776	34	43	23	11	12	6
<b>Pharmacy (Pre-Pharmacy)</b>	584	25	57	34	29	23	12
<b>Marketing Management and Research</b>	644	29	52	31	21	18	11
<b>Computer Engineering</b>	375	17	45	23	29	24	10
<b>Psychology, General</b>	352	16	67	48	27	25	17
<b>Music, General</b>	567	27	39	19	12	11	5
<b>Engineering (Pre-Engineering), General</b>	443	22	42	24	27	23	13
<b>Biochemistry and Biophysics</b>	755	39	65	39	36	31	20
<b>Small Business Management/Operations</b>	330	18	26	15	8	5	2
<b>Theatre Arts/Drama</b>	602	32	51	31	15	15	8
<b>Electrical, Electronics and Comm. Engineering</b>	368	21	41	21	25	18	9

Note: *Undecided* and/or *No Major Indicated* are included in the table, if applicable. The former refers to students who selected the option *Undecided* from the list of majors. The latter refers to students who did not respond to the question.

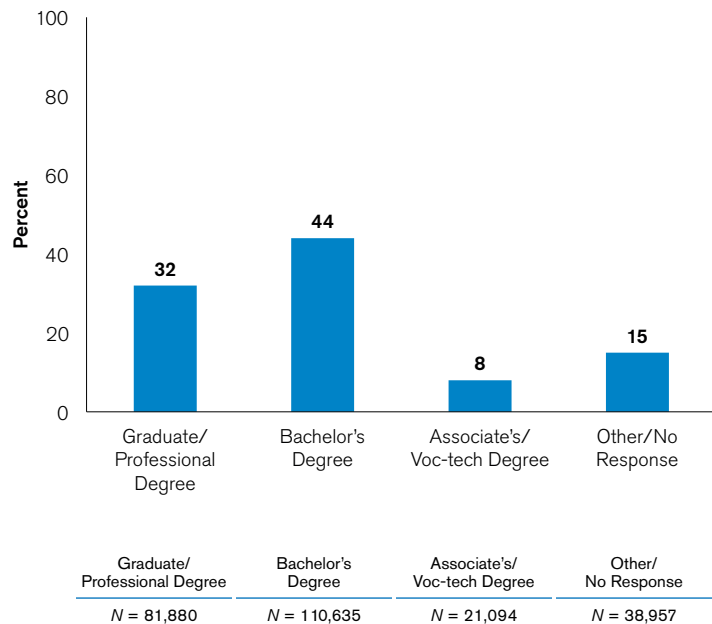
# African American Students

## Other College and Career Readiness Factors

### *Aligning Student Behaviors, Planning, and Aspirations*

Most students aspire to a post-high school credential. To help them meet those aspirations, educational planning, monitoring, and interventions must be aligned to their aspirations, begin early, and continue throughout their educational careers.

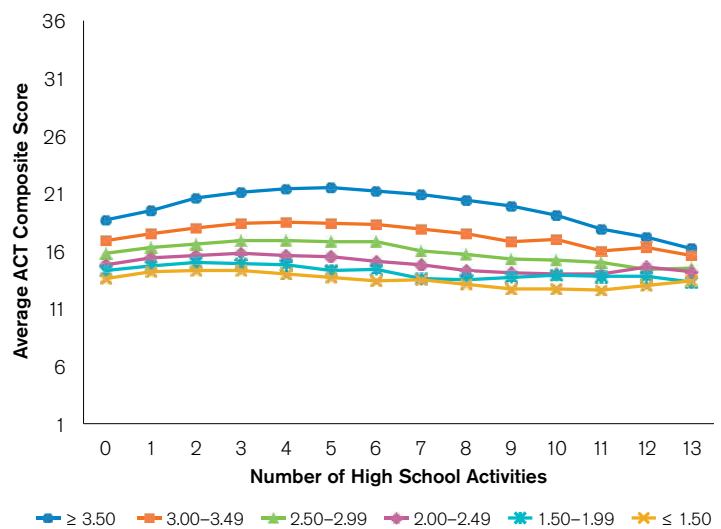
Percent of 2015 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates by Educational Aspirations



### *Activity and Achievement: What's the Connection?*

There are wide-ranging benefits to student participation in high school activities. Students can develop new skills, broaden their experiences, practice social skills, and increase their appeal to college admissions personnel. In addition, ACT data indicate that, regardless of a student's high school GPA, involvement in high school activities is often associated with higher ACT Composite scores. At the same time, results typically identify a point of diminishing returns, one where many activities are associated with a drop in ACT scores. The adjacent graph depicts the relationship between ACT scores and the number of high school activities for 2015 graduates.

Average ACT Composite Score by Number of Activities within High School GPA Ranges for 2015 Graduates

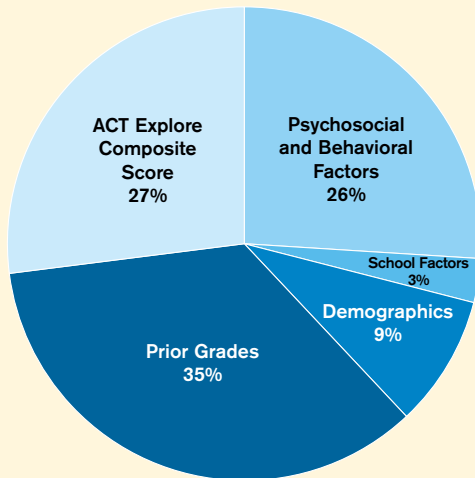


Note: In some cases, high activity counts may represent low numbers of students, giving rise to missing and outlying data points.

# Other College and Career Readiness Factors

## Early Prediction of High School Outcomes

**Relative Importance of Predictors of 12th-Grade Cumulative High School Grade Point Average**

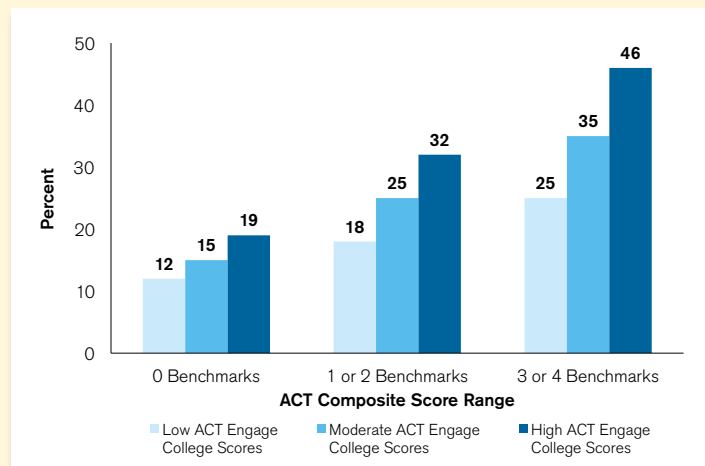


Note: The data used for this analysis came from a longitudinal sample of 3,768 students from 21 schools who took both ACT Explore and ACT Engage Grades 6–9 in 2006, when most students were in 8th grade. Additional waves of data were collected each fall, ending in 2011, when most students should have graduated from high school. The total variance explained in the model was  $R^2 = 0.51$ .

Understanding which student characteristics can predict future performance is essential to early identification and support for students at risk for later academic difficulties. A longitudinal research study found that, in 8th grade, the most important predictor of 12th grade GPA was student grades, followed by academic achievement (measured by ACT Explore) and psychosocial and behavioral factors (measured by ACT Engage® Grades 6–9).<sup>11</sup> Demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, and parent education) and school factors (percent eligible for free/reduced lunch eligible and percent minority) were less important predictors. These findings underscore the value of using multiple measures, including academic achievement and behaviors, to provide a more holistic approach to assessment that can better assist students in developing the knowledge and skills needed for success.

## Academic Achievement, Behaviors, and College Completion

**Percentage Attaining a Postsecondary Degree by ACT and ACT Engage College Scores**



Academic behaviors also matter for college outcomes. Across all ACT College Readiness Benchmark levels, students with higher ACT Engage College scores (based on the mean percentile scores of ACT Engage scales Academic Discipline, Commitment to College, and Social Connection) attained a postsecondary degree within four years of college at higher rates than students with lower ACT Engage College scores. For students meeting three or four Benchmarks, those with high ACT Engage College scores attained a timely postsecondary degree at nearly twice the rate as those with low ACT Engage College scores.

Note: Based on a longitudinal sample of 9,446 ACT-tested students from 48 postsecondary institutions who took ACT Engage College during their first semester of college in 2003. Additional waves of data were collected each semester through 2008. Students with a mean percentile score of less than 25 were classified as low, those with scores between 25 and 75 were classified as moderate, and those with scores greater than 75 were classified as high.

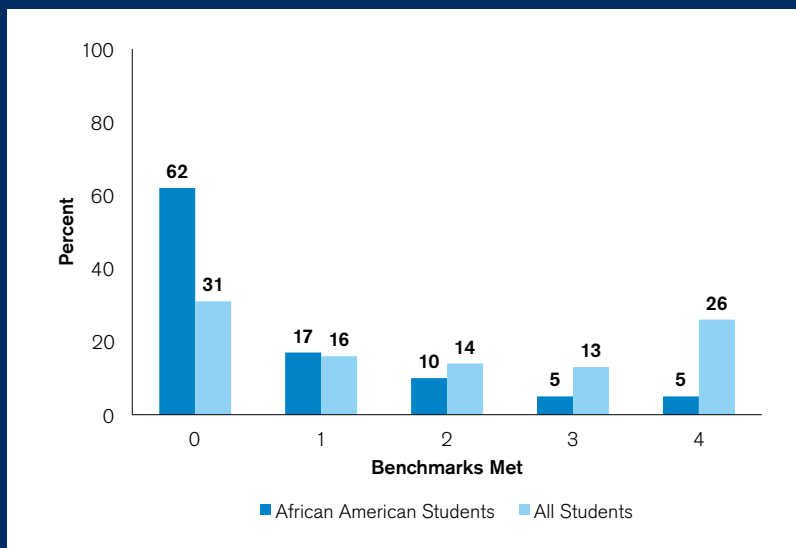
# Looking Back at the Class of 2014

## African American Students

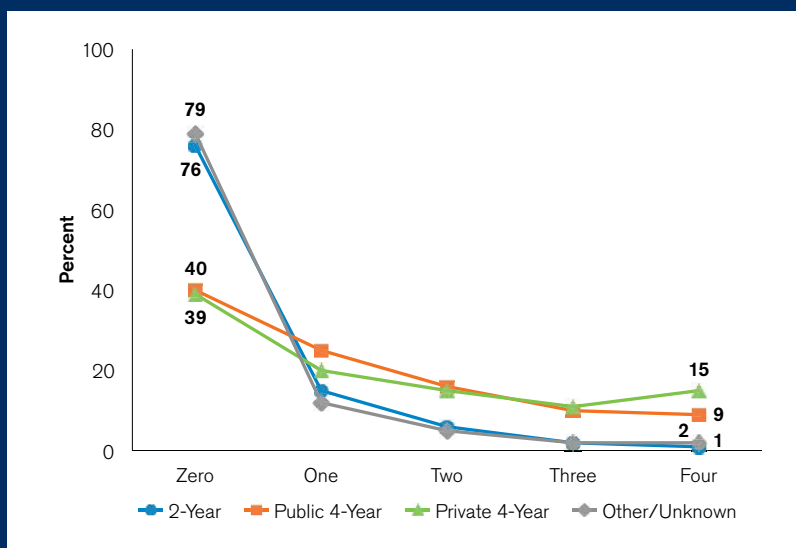
### *ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and Fall 2014 College Enrollment*

Academic achievement, as measured by ACT College Readiness Benchmark attainment, has a clear and distinctive relationship with the path taken by high school graduates. Those who were more academically ready were more likely to enroll in 4-year institutions (note the 35–40 percentage point difference at 0 Benchmarks met and the inflection point at 1 Benchmark met). Graduates who enrolled in 2-year colleges or pursued other options after high school were more likely to have met fewer Benchmarks. For the sizable number of 2014 graduates who did not meet any Benchmarks, their post-high school opportunities appear to have been limited compared to their college-ready peers.

Percent of 2014 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates by Number of ACT College Readiness Benchmarks Attained



Percent of 2014 ACT-Tested African American High School Graduates by Number of ACT College Readiness Benchmarks Attained and Fall 2014 College Enrollment Status





# Policies and Practices

## Call to Action

*The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015* points to the need for federal, state, and local policymakers and agency heads to support the readiness of *all* students for college and career. Over the last several years, the average national ACT Composite score and ACT College Readiness Benchmark attainment of students taking the ACT has remained relatively constant. This is commendable given the increase in the number of students taking the ACT but little comfort to the students, teachers, and administrators working every day to increase student achievement. Because the current direction and aim of our education system is to prepare all students for postsecondary and career success, this year's results continue to signal the need for increased wholesale systemic supports and reforms.

As a research-based nonprofit organization, ACT is committed to identifying solutions that are informed by data and that reinforce the need for students to meet appropriate achievement benchmarks at every point along the continuum from kindergarten through career. As part of this commitment, ACT released a series of policy platforms (<http://www.act.org/policyplatforms>) in December 2014 containing extensive recommendations in three areas: K–12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce development.

In this same spirit, ACT and UNCF offer the following recommendations as a call to action for the entire education community: students; parents; educators; and policymakers at the district, state, and federal levels.

### Data Use

**Collect more data that provide a true reflection of students' educational experiences and allow research that examines both obstacles and opportunities for success.** Transparent data systems at the state, local, and district levels are essential to understanding the academic landscape for students. These data systems must not only include a holistic picture of performance, but also be disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status, which allows for a more accurate portrait of educational outcomes. Researchers, practitioners, and teachers can use these data to inform practices and improve educational trajectories for all students. Parents also can use these data to evaluate school quality, safety, and equity in order to ask the right questions to ensure their child is being treated fairly.<sup>12</sup> Quality data systems also help to identify where gaps lie and where interventions should be focused. To ensure that students are prepared for the 21st century, states must have P–16 longitudinal data systems that allow schools and districts to closely monitor student performance at every stage of the learning pipeline, from preschool through college. Policies governing teacher and administrator preparation and professional development must include an emphasis on developing skills to use data appropriately to improve the

practices of teaching and learning for all students in the pipeline.

**Continue to implement monitoring and early warning systems that help educators identify and intervene with at-risk students.** An effective monitoring system should provide an evolving picture of students over time and identify their unique learning needs at various points along their educational careers. Adoption of such systems in states where they do not yet exist—as well as expansion of system capabilities in states where they currently exist—will support earlier and more effective interventions by providing teachers with information to implement the necessary interventions to maximize student potential. Teachers, who have been consistently identified as the most important school-based factor in student achievement, should be equipped with as much relevant data as possible to inform and supplement their efforts. The data should help to identify students in need of intervention and model student growth toward college and career readiness.

### Implement a high-quality student assessment system.

As states adopt and implement new high-quality assessment systems, they should ensure that those systems measure and provide timely and actionable information about student performance aligned to college and career readiness. High-quality assessments must:

- Monitor growth over a student's educational experience, starting in elementary school and through high school, so that educators can make timely instructional decisions and interventions based on reliable information.
- Be aligned, linked, and longitudinal in nature to be an effective tool for students, teachers, administrators, and parents in monitoring student progress.
- Be mindful of and incorporate the unique accessibility needs of English language learners and students with disabilities, and the tests must be constructed in deep consultation with experts on these populations.
- Vary according to the type of standards that need to be measured. These multiple measures can be used to offer more comprehensive evaluations of student achievement, from multiple-choice and constructed-response assessments to performance tasks and project-based learning.
- Be offered through multiple platforms. While computer based testing is highly applicable to formative assessments that can be conducted on demand, paper-and-pencil testing may be a reality for states and districts with less technological capacity. Until computer and broadband access for such large groups of students are sufficiently widespread in schools, both platforms must be available.
- Offer multiple stakeholders—especially teachers—ongoing, real-time, interactive reporting and access to assessment results and other related data.

# Policies and Practices

These principles are consistent with the goals of other principles for high-quality college and career readiness assessments set forth by experts in the field.

## *System Alignment*

**Encourage education system alignment so that all components work together.** In a climate conditioned to the strict accountability mandates in the No Child Left Behind Act, alignment seems to refer only to how assessments align to particular standards, and in many cases has forced educators to think only about test scores. True education system alignment means that all components—standards, curricula, assessments, and instruction—work together to achieve desired goals. State and federal policymakers must prioritize funding to ensure that the necessary pieces are in place to help all students meet college and career readiness standards.

**Set clear performance standards to evaluate college and career readiness.** States must define performance standards so that everyone knows “how good is good enough” for students to have a reasonable chance of success at college or on the job. ACT defines college readiness in English, reading, math, and science using decades of student performance data. For each area, students who are considered college ready have a 50% chance of earning a B or higher or about a 75% chance of earning a C or higher in the corresponding first-year English Composition, introductory social science, College Algebra, or Biology course. Longitudinal, real-world data and research on what constitutes student success are now available to every state and district, as are standards and benchmarks against which the performance of students and schools can be measured and state progress noted.

**Provide all students with access to a rigorous high school core curriculum.** While in recent years, most states have increased course requirements for high school graduation, too often those requirements have not specified the particular courses that prepare students for postsecondary success. In the absence of such specific and rigorous high school graduation requirements, too many students are not taking either the right number or the right kinds of courses they need to be ready for college and career. Access to rigorous coursework is especially salient for African American students as they are less likely than white students to have access to college-ready courses. All states, therefore, should specify the number and kinds of courses that students need to take to graduate academically ready for life after high school. At minimum, ACT and UNCF recommend the following:

- Four years of English
- Three years of mathematics, including rigorous courses in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II
- Three years of science, including rigorous courses in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics
- Three years of social studies

## *Teacher Support and Development*

**Develop robust teacher evaluation systems.** Efforts to safeguard and use data appropriately and to fully align the education system are moot if we do not invest in one of the most important components of student learning: teachers. As stated in our K–12 education platform, ACT applauds states’ and districts’ development and use of robust teacher evaluation systems that include multiple measures of performance to identify effective teaching and focus on professional development. All teacher evaluations should include classroom observations, parent and student surveys, and measures of student growth on assessments, and teachers should be involved in the creation and rollout of these systems.

**Strengthen admissions criteria for teacher education programs and offer professional development to new teachers.** We must ensure that the admissions criteria for teacher education programs are rigorous and produce high-quality candidates armed with the tools—sound instructional methods, content mastery, and data literacy—to teach effectively. Once in the classroom, teachers must have the opportunity to participate in professional development opportunities that enhance their work.

**Invest in a culturally competent and diverse teacher force.** While students of color represent the majority of public school enrollment, teachers of color only represent about 17% of public school teachers.<sup>13</sup> Despite these dismal numbers, a significant body of research has consistently demonstrated the positive influence of a racially diverse teaching force on academic outcomes for both minority and white students.<sup>14</sup> A culturally competent and racially diverse teaching force may be more apt to understanding minority students’ social, familial, and educational environments. Cultural competency training for administrators and staff would also be beneficial in educating a diverse study body. As such, schools and districts must be intentional in both recruiting and retaining high-quality African American teachers that understand such nuances. Strategic and intentional staffing may involve expanding recruitment activities beyond established networks to more diverse spaces, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Mentoring and support for novice teachers can be a beneficial tool to help retain those talented teachers. Additionally, K–12 institutions, colleges, and education nonprofits should strive to make teaching a more attractive and viable career path for African American students in order to help build a more diverse pipeline of educators for the teaching profession.<sup>15</sup> The impetus to pursue a teaching career may also begin in the classroom as students may look up to educators as role models. As such, the vast underrepresentation of African American teachers can have enduring effects on students and the educational landscape for years to come.

# Policies and Practices

**Address disproportionate discipline for African American students that reduce class time, opportunities to learn, and further hinders college readiness.** The US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights data reveal that African American students are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled from school than white students. Additionally, African American students comprised only 18% of the preschool population, yet represented 48% of students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension.<sup>16</sup> These vast inequities in discipline mean that a subset of students are spending a significant amount of time out of the classroom and have decreased opportunities to learn. The Department of Education also suggests that the widespread use of suspensions in schools negatively affects students' academic achievement.<sup>17</sup> Eliminating zero tolerance policies, investing in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), employing restorative justice approaches, and staff training are all tools that can help with alleviating these discipline issues.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, transparent data systems at the district and state level can help identify disproportionate trends in discipline and allow administrators to develop appropriate interventions. These practices will help ensure students are spending more quality time in the classroom preparing for a postsecondary future.

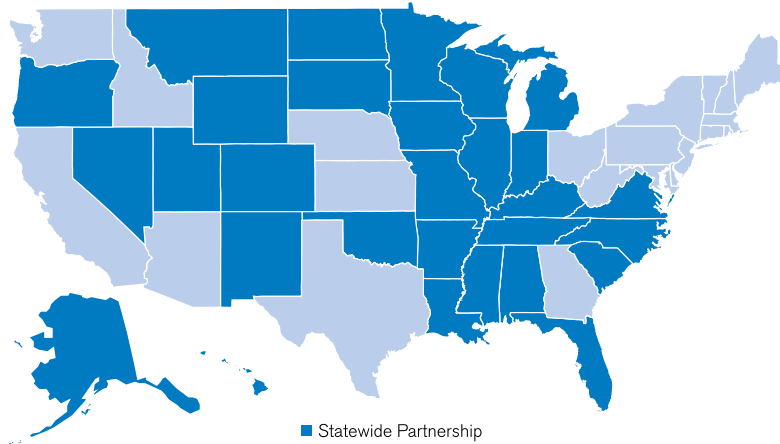
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It is time to take these and other meaningful steps to solve the issues hindering student success. ACT sincerely hopes that this call to action, informed by decades of educational research, contributes to the enhancement of education and career opportunities for all students, including our nation's most underserved individuals. ACT stands ready to work with like-minded organizations to support systemic education reforms. Ensuring a world-class US educational system should be a responsibility shared by all of us: our future rests on the education of tomorrow's leaders. We must do better.

# Resources


## Statewide Partnerships in College and Career Readiness

States that incorporate ACT college and career readiness solutions as part of their statewide assessments provide greater access to higher education and increase the likelihood of student success in postsecondary education. Educators also have the ability to establish a longitudinal plan using ACT assessments, which provide high schools, districts, and states with unique student-level data that can be used for effective student intervention plans.



State administration of ACT programs and services:

- Increases opportunities for minority and middle- to low-income students.
- Promotes student educational and career planning.
- Reduces the need for remediation.
- Correlates with increases in college enrollment, persistence, and student success.
- Aligns with state standards.

<b>ACT<sup>®</sup> Aspire<sup>™</sup></b>	<b>ACT<sup>®</sup> Explore<sup>™</sup></b>	<b>ACT<sup>®</sup> Plan<sup>™</sup></b>	<b>The ACT<sup>®</sup></b>	<b>ACT<sup>®</sup> QualityCore<sup>™</sup></b>	<b>ACT<sup>®</sup> WorkKeys<sup>™</sup></b>		<b>ACT National Career Readiness Certificate<sup>™</sup></b>
<b>3rd- through 8th-grade students</b>	<b>8th- and 9th-grade students</b>	<b>10th-grade students</b>	<b>11th- and 12th-grade students</b>	<b>8th- through 12th-grade students</b>	<b>11th- and 12th-grade students</b>		
Alabama	Arkansas	Arkansas	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Oklahoma
Arkansas	Louisiana	Florida	Alaska	Kentucky	Alaska	Alaska	Oregon
Hawaii	North Carolina	Louisiana	Arkansas		Hawaii	Arkansas	South Carolina
	Oklahoma	North Carolina	Colorado		Kentucky	Indiana	South Dakota
<b>8th- through 10th-grade students</b>	Tennessee	Oklahoma	Hawaii		Louisiana	Iowa	Tennessee
	Utah	Tennessee	Illinois		Michigan	Kentucky	Tennessee
Alabama		Utah	Kentucky		North Carolina	Louisiana	Utah
Arkansas			Louisiana		Carolina	Minnesota	Virginia
Hawaii			Minnesota		North Dakota	Missouri	Wisconsin
Wisconsin			Mississippi		Dakota	New Mexico	
Wyoming			Missouri		South Carolina	North Carolina	
			Montana		Wisconsin	Carolina	
			Nevada		Wyoming		
			North Carolina				
			North Dakota				
			Tennessee				
			Utah				
			Wisconsin				
			Wyoming				

All listed partnerships are effective as of July 2015.

# ACT Research

The continued increase of test takers enhances the breadth and depth of the data pool, providing a comprehensive picture of the current college readiness levels of the graduating class as well as offering a glimpse of the emerging national educational pipeline. It also allows us to review various aspects of the ACT-tested graduating class, including the following reports:

## Releasing in the 2015–2016 Academic Year

### *The Condition of STEM 2015*

- National report
- State reports
- Underserved learners

### *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2015*

- National report
- State reports
- African American students
- American Indian students
- Asian students

- Hispanic students
- Pacific Islander students
- First-generation students
- Linguistically diverse students
- Students from low-income families

## Other ACT Research Reports

### **College Choice Report (for the graduating class of 2013)**

- *Part 1: Preferences and Prospects*—November 2013
- *Part 2: Enrollment Patterns*—July 2014
- *Part 3: Persistence and Transfer*—April 2015

### **College Choice Report (for the graduating class of 2014)**

- *Part 1: Expanding Opportunities: Preferences and Prospects*—November 2014
- *Part 2: Expanding Opportunities: Enrollment Patterns*—July 2015

To be notified of exact release dates, please subscribe here:

[www.act.org/research/subscribe.html](http://www.act.org/research/subscribe.html).

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## How Does ACT Determine if Students Are College Ready?

The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. Based on a nationally stratified sample, the Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and represent a typical set of expectations. ACT College Readiness Benchmarks were revised for 2013 graduating class reporting. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are:

College Course	Subject Area Test	Original ACT College Readiness Benchmark	Revised ACT College Readiness Benchmark
English Composition	English	18	18
Social Sciences	Reading	21	22
College Algebra	Mathematics	22	22
Biology	Science	24	23

## Notes

1. The data presented herein are based on the *ACT Profile Report—National: Graduating Class 2015 for African American Students*, accessible at [www.act.org/research](http://www.act.org/research). With the exception of the top graph on page 6, data related to students who did not provide information or who responded “Other” to questions about gender, race/ethnicity, high school curriculum, etc., are not presented explicitly.
2. Davis, James. (2003). “Early School and Academic Achievement of African American Males.” *Urban Education* 38 (5): 515-537; Dougherty, Chrys. (2003). *College and Career Readiness: The Importance of Early Learning Success* (Iowa City, IA: ACT). <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ImportanceofEarlyLearning.pdf>; Ferguson, Ronald. (2007). *Toward Excellence with Equity: An Emerging Vision for Closing the Achievement Gap* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press); Jencks, Christopher and Meredith Phillips. (1998). *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press); Vanneman, Alan, Linda Hamilton, Janet Baldwin Anderson, & Taslima Rahman. (2009). *Achievement Gaps: How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Statistical Analysis Report (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics). NCES 2009-455; See *The Achievement Gap Initiative* at Harvard University for resources on the academic achievement gaps in the US. <http://www.agi.harvard.edu/index.php>.
3. Snyder, T.D., and S.A. Dillow. (2015). *Digest of Education Statistics 2013* (NCES 2015-011). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education. Washington, DC; Complete College America. (2012). *Remediation: Higher Education’s Bridge to Nowhere*. [www.completecollege.org/docs/CCA-Remediation-final.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/CCA-Remediation-final.pdf).
4. Castleman, Benjamin and Lindsay Page. (2013.) “Can Text Messages Mitigate Summer Melt?” *The New England Journal of Higher Education*. <http://www.nebhe.org/thejournal/can-text-messages-mitigate-summer-melt/>.
5. Rhonda T. Bryant. (2015). *College Preparation for African American Students: Gaps in the High School Educational Experience* (Washington, DC: CLASP). <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/College-readiness2-2.pdf>. US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection. (March 2014). *Data Snapshot: College and Career Readiness*. Issue Brief No. 3.
6. Ibid.
7. Almost 90% of low-income African Americans surveyed wanted their child to attend and graduate from college. Bridges, Brian K., Janet Awokoya, & Frances Messano. (2012). *Done to Us, Not With Us: African American Parent Perceptions of K–12 Education*. Washington, DC: Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, UNCF. [http://www.uncf.org/fdpri/Portals/0/fdpri.Done\\_to\\_Us\\_Not\\_With\\_Us.pdf](http://www.uncf.org/fdpri/Portals/0/fdpri.Done_to_Us_Not_With_Us.pdf).
8. The race/ethnicity categories changed in 2011 to reflect updated US Department of Education reporting requirements; trends to previous reports may not be available for all race/ethnicity categories.
9. Data reflect subject-specific curriculum. For example, English “Core or More” results pertain to students who took at least four years of English, regardless of courses taken in other subject areas.
10. The interest-major fit score measures the strength of the relationship between the student’s profile of ACT Interest Inventory scores and the profile of students’ interests in the major shown. Interest profiles for majors are based on a national sample of undergraduate students with a declared major and a GPA of at least 2.0. Major was determined in the third year for students in 4-year colleges and in the second year for students in 2-year colleges. Interest-major fit scores range from 0–99, with values of 80 and higher indicating good fit.
11. ACT Engage is a family of low-stakes assessments that measures students’ academic behavioral skills in the areas of motivation, social engagement, and self-regulation from 6th grade through the first year of college.
12. US Department of Education, Partners in Progress “Parent Checklist.” America Achieves, National PTA, NCLR, and UNCF. <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>.

13. Goldring, Rebecca, Lucinda Gray, & Amy Bitterman. (2013). Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics) <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013314.pdf>.
14. Meier, Kenneth, Robert Wrinkle, & J.L. Polinard. (1999). "Representative Bureaucracy and Distributional Equity: Addressing the Hard Question," *Journal of Politics* 61(4), 1025-39; Rocha, Rene & Daniel Hawes. (2009). "Racial Diversity, Representative Bureaucracy, and Equity in Multiracial School Districts," *Social Science Quarterly* 90(2): 326-44; Roch, Christine, David Pitts, & Ignacio Navarro. (2010). "Representative Bureaucracy and Policy Tools: Ethnicity, Student Discipline, and Representation in Public Schools," *Administration & Society* 42(1): 38-65; Kenneth Meier, Joseph Stewart, Jr., & Robert E. England. (1989). *Race, Class, and Education: The Politics of Second-Generation Discrimination* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press) Dee, Thomas. (2005). "A Teacher Like Me: Does Race, Ethnicity or Gender Matter?" *American Economic Review* 95(2): 158-165.
15. ACT, Inc. (2015). *The Condition of Future Educators 2014*. <http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCCR-2014-FutureEducators.pdf>.
16. US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection. (March 2014). *Data Snapshot: School Discipline*. Issue Brief No. 1.
17. US Department of Education, *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*. January 2014. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>.
18. Contractor, Danya and Cheryl Staats. (2014). *Interventions to Address Racialized Discipline Disparities and School "Push Out"*. (Columbus, OH: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity Policy Brief.) <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ki-interventions.pdf>.

ACT is an independent, nonprofit organization that provides assessment, research, information, and program management services in the broad areas of education and workforce development. Each year, we serve millions of people in high schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, and government agencies, nationally and internationally. Though designed to meet a wide array of needs, all ACT programs and services have one guiding purpose—helping people achieve education and workplace success.

For more information, visit [www.act.org](http://www.act.org).



Since its founding in 1944, UNCF has raised more than \$3.6 billion to help more than 400,000 students receive college degrees at UNCF member institutions and with UNCF scholarships. UNCF plays a critical role in enabling more than 60,000 students each year to attend college and get the education they need (and that the nation needs them to have) by:

- Awarding 10,000 scholarships and internships for students from low- and moderate-income families to attend more than 900 colleges and universities across the country
- Providing financial support for its 37 historically black member colleges and universities for scholarships and capacity building
- Advocating nationally for the importance of education and college readiness through its annual television program, a national public service announcement campaign, and commentary in national media
- Advocating locally at events across the country, such as governor's and mayor's luncheons, Walk for Education events, and Mayor's Masked Balls

For more information, visit [www.uncf.org](http://www.uncf.org).



A copy of this report can be found at  
[www.act.org/research](http://www.act.org/research)