

School-Day Administration of the ACT[®] Test: Removing Barriers and Opening Doors for All Students

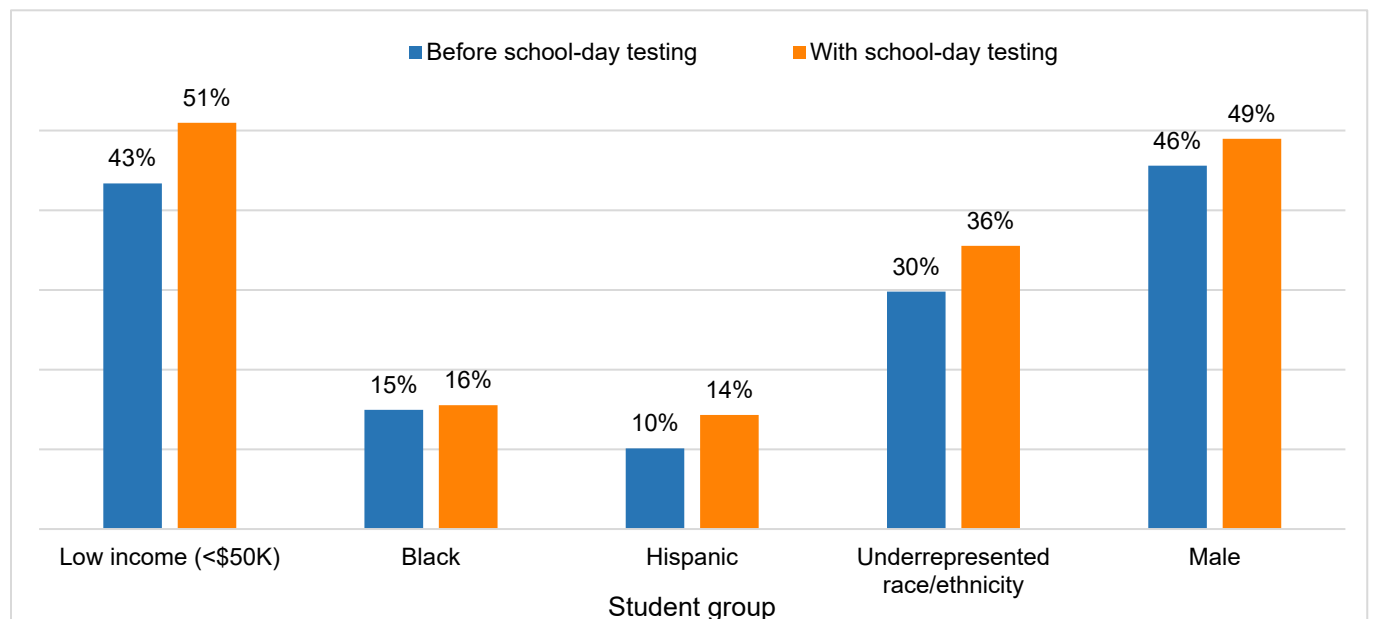
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ACT is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help people achieve education and workplace success. To help fulfill that mission, ACT offers school-day testing programs that provide all students with state- or district-funded access to its college readiness and admissions assessment, removing barriers to testing and opening doors to postsecondary opportunities. During the 2021–2022 academic year, over 1.3 million students, across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, participated in ACT school-day testing through state or district testing programs.¹ Of these 1.3 million students, we estimate that 59% could be considered members of underserved student populations according to at least one criterion.² In this brief, we describe six evidence-backed benefits of school-day ACT testing.

#1. Removes Barriers to Testing

School-day ACT testing provides all students with greater access to testing. Without school-day testing, students who take the ACT test are disproportionately higher income, white or Asian, and female. School-day testing leads to a better representation of students who are low income, male, and members of racial/ethnic groups that are underrepresented in postsecondary education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Demographics of ACT-Tested Graduating Class³



Not only does school-day testing provide the ACT test to students at no cost, but it also removes several barriers that prevent students from having college-reportable test scores. For example, although about one fifth of ACT registrations for Saturday test dates are completed with a fee waiver, about one quarter of these registrations result in a test-day absence (Cruce, Moore, & Hayes, 2020; Cruce, Hayes, & Moore, 2020). Of these test-day absentees, roughly two thirds did not know that they would miss their test until the day of the test, and common reasons for their absences were last-minute scheduling conflicts, a lack of transportation, and not having the necessary testing materials (Moore et al., 2021).

With greater access to testing, more students can access the benefits of testing, which are summarized next.

#2. Increases the Number of Students Identified as College Ready

When all students have school-day access to the ACT test, more students are able to demonstrate their readiness for college and careers. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks indicate whether students are ready for first-year credit-bearing college courses, and students who meet the Benchmarks can often avoid remedial coursework. Figure 2 shows the percent increase in the number of students meeting Benchmarks in each subject area with school-day testing (for example, if 100 students initially met the Benchmark, a 50% increase would result in 50 more students, or 150 students in total, meeting the Benchmark). When all students at a school have access to school-day testing, the numbers of students that demonstrate readiness for English composition, college algebra, courses in the social sciences, and biology increase by 33%, 25%, 29%, and 25%, respectively. Average ACT scores tend to decrease when school-day testing is implemented because a more academically diverse group of students is being tested. **Nevertheless, school-day testing still results in sizable increases in the number of students identified as college ready, indicating that many college-ready students would not have taken the ACT without the school-day testing program.**

Figure 2. Percent Increase in Number of Students Demonstrating Readiness for College With School-Day Testing⁴

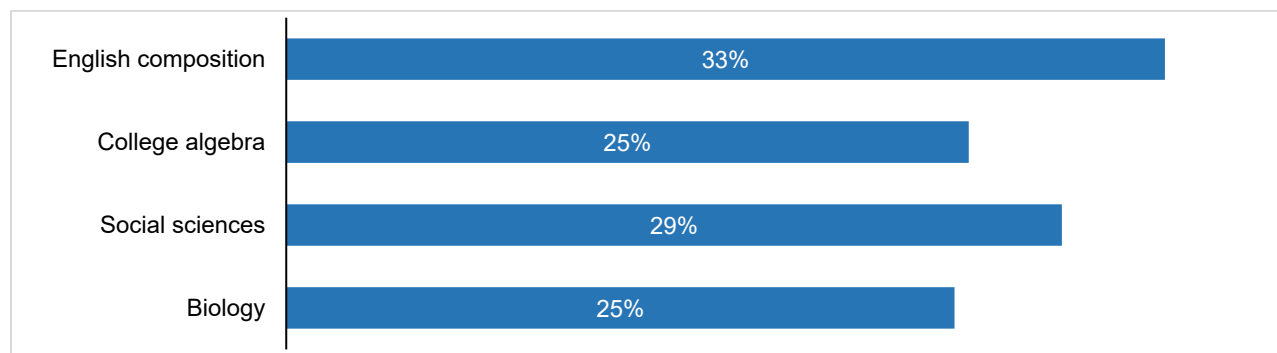
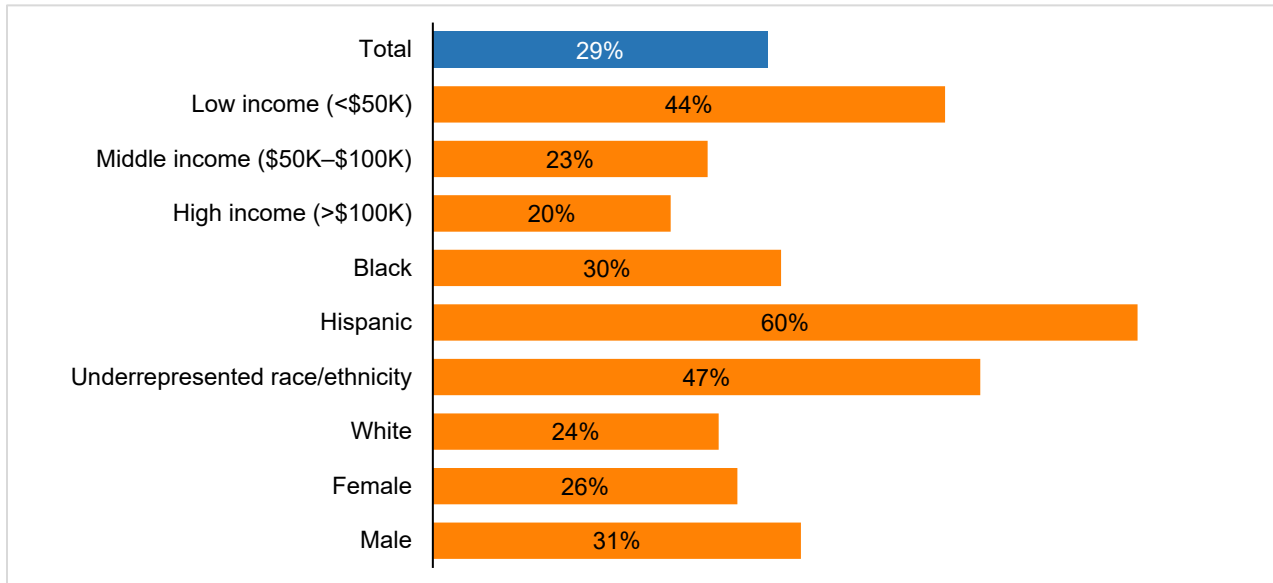


Figure 3 shows that the relative increase in the number of Benchmarks met is largest for students who are low income or from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.

Figure 3. Percent Increase in Number of College Readiness Benchmarks Met With School-Day Testing



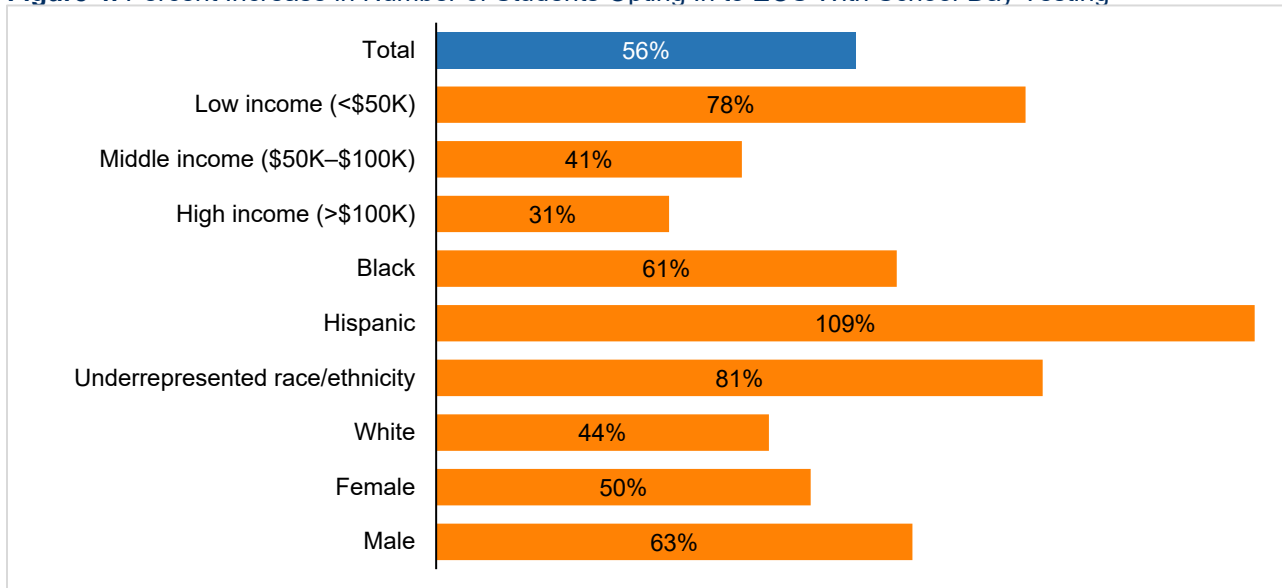
School-day testing also leads to more students meeting criteria for scholarships and admissions into colleges and academic programs that consider test scores.

#3. Increases the Number of Students Who Are Contacted by Colleges

ACT's Educational Opportunity Service (EOS) provides students with information about postsecondary educational opportunities and scholarships by connecting them with eligible colleges and scholarship agencies. Students can opt in to EOS when they register for the ACT.⁵ Colleges can use EOS to identify and recruit students whose backgrounds and achievement levels align with those of the students in their desired applicant pool.

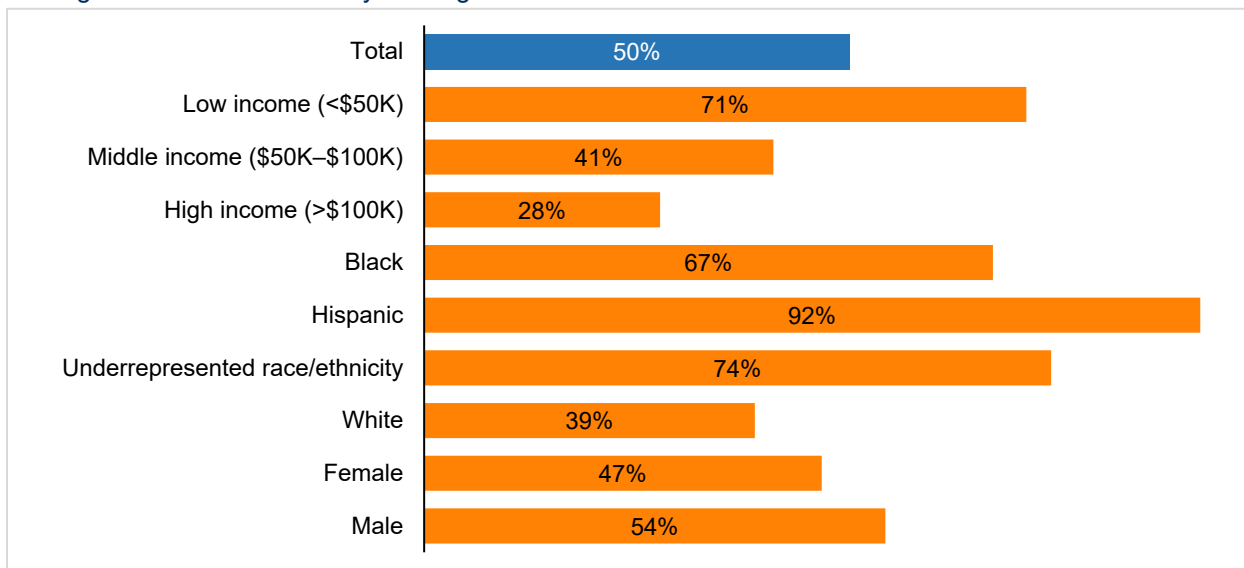
When all students at a school have access to school-day testing, the number of students who opt in to EOS increases by 56%, meaning that more students have made their names available to colleges and scholarship agencies (Figure 4). Moreover, the increase in the number of students opting in to EOS is disproportionately greater for students who are currently underrepresented in postsecondary education, such as male students, students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and low-income students.

Figure 4. Percent Increase in Number of Students Opting In to EOS With School-Day Testing



The number of students who are identified for recruitment by at least one postsecondary institution also increases with school-day testing. Figure 5 shows that when school-day testing is offered, there is a 50% increase in the number of students identified as prospects by at least one of the hundreds of colleges that participate in EOS. As with the increase in the number of students opting in to EOS, the increase in the number of students identified for recruitment is disproportionately greater for male students, students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and low-income students.

Figure 5. Percent Increase in Number of Students Identified as Prospects by At Least One College Through EOS With School-Day Testing⁶



#4. Provides a Complete Picture for Research

School-day testing provides valuable insights regarding the college and career readiness of a state's or district's entire cohort of students. Because students usually take a school-day ACT test in the spring of 11th grade or the fall of 12th grade, the information from the test summarizes educational development and college and career plans near the end of the K–12 schooling experience, when students are approaching key transition points. School-day testing enhances the insights gained from ACT data because the data gathered from testing better represent the whole student population. ACT school-day testing can help a state or district gain a clear, objective view of how well it is meeting its educational goals.

Here are two examples of state-level research that is enhanced with ACT school-day testing:

- Comparisons of average ACT test scores and percentages of students ready for college courses. This and several other topics are included in ACT's national and state [Profile Reports](#) and [Data Visualization Tool](#) for high school graduating cohorts.
- Analysis of college enrollment in-migration and out-migration patterns. [ACT's Interstate College Student Migration Database](#) provides insights on “brain gain/drain,” state-to-state migrations, and migration patterns for different student groups.

#5. Leads to Improvement in College Enrollment

Peer-reviewed studies by external researchers suggest that statewide testing has led to modest increases in college enrollment.

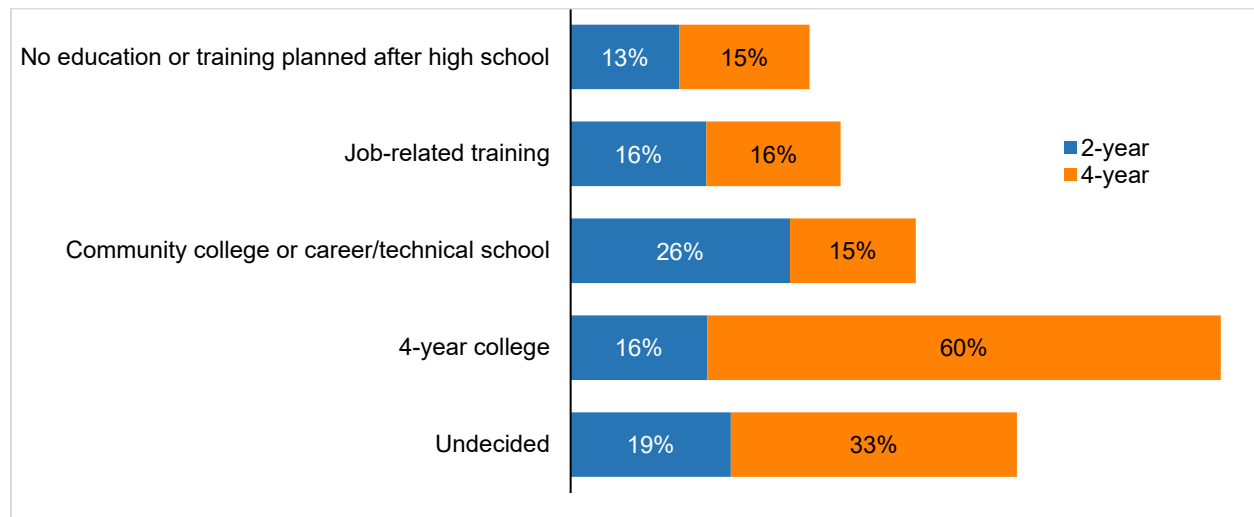
- In one state, it was estimated that ACT statewide testing increased college enrollment by about 10 percentage points, with more students attending 4-year colleges and fewer students attending 2-year colleges. Statewide testing also led to a significant increase in full-time enrollment (Klasik, 2013).
- In another state, ACT statewide testing increased college enrollment at both 2-year and 4-year colleges (but the effect was statistically significant only at 2-year colleges) and increased full-time enrollment (Klasik, 2013).
- In another state, statewide administration of a college entrance exam on a non-school day (i.e., on Saturday) increased enrollment rates at 4-year colleges by 2–3 percentage points (and by 10 percentage points for students who would not otherwise have tested) (Hurwitz et al., 2015).
- In another state, ACT statewide testing slightly increased college enrollment (by 0.3 percentage points), with more students attending 4-year colleges and fewer students attending 2-year colleges. The increase was largest for low-income students (Hyman, 2017).

#6. Provides Valuable Information to Students Navigating Different Paths

While not all students go to college, many of the academic skills needed for college readiness and assessed by the ACT test are also relevant to many career and workforce training programs. In addition to receiving their Composite and section test scores, ACT-tested students receive a prediction of what level of the ACT® WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate® they are likely to earn.

Further, many students change their college plans during or after high school, making an ACT score valuable to students who may not initially think that they will use it. Figure 6 shows college enrollment rates with the data grouped by the educational plans that students reported in 10th grade. As expected, college enrollment rates were highest for students who planned to attend a 4-year college. But even among students with no postsecondary education or training planned, 28% enrolled in college within a year after their high school graduation. For these students, having ACT results may have helped them plan their next step.

Figure 6. College Enrollment Rates, by Educational Plans⁷



The data on school-day testing clearly illustrate the range of benefits not only for students but also for educators, administrators, policymakers, and researchers. As states and districts focus on improving college and career readiness and postsecondary enrollment, particularly for low-income students and underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, school-day administration of the ACT ensures that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their level of academic preparation. A school-day ACT test also exposes all students—not just those who already planned to attend college—to an important step in the college-going process. School-day ACT testing provides an efficient means of meeting the multiple goals of a high school assessment, benefitting states and the students they serve.

References

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Notes

¹ Sixteen states use the ACT as a statewide test for their 11th graders. Seven of these states use the ACT for federal accountability under ESEA/ESSA. Six other states fund the administration of the ACT on behalf of districts, schools, or students who choose to take it.

² To be considered an underserved learner, a student must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) The student's race/ethnicity is African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, or two or more races.
- 2) The student's family income is less than or equal to \$50,000.
- 3) The highest parental education level is high school diploma or lower.

³ School-day ACT statewide testing programs began in 2001, and district programs began in 2008. Figure 1 is based on schools that began 11th-grade school-day testing at some point between 2001 and 2021 (graduating cohorts of 2002 through 2022). For each school, the data include the last cohort before school-day testing began and the first cohort with school-day testing. Underrepresented racial/ethnic groups are Black, Hispanic, Native American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

⁴ Figures 2, 3, and 4 are based on schools that began 11th-grade school-day testing at some point between 2001 and 2021 (graduating cohorts of 2002 through 2022). For each school, the data include the last cohort before school-day testing began and the first cohort with school-day testing.

⁵ States offering the ACT under a statewide contract can opt out of EOS, meaning that students cannot opt in to EOS based on their statewide ACT test.

⁶ Figure 5 is based on the graduating high school cohorts of 2011 through 2018. This limited time frame is based on the availability of EOS data. For each school, the data include the last cohort before school-day testing began and the first cohort with school-day testing. Students located in states that elected to opt out of EOS for the years under study are not included in the analyses in this section of the issue brief.

⁷ Figure 6 is based on a sample of 407,889 students who took the PreACT and ACT tests and completed high school in 2020 or 2021. Students reported their educational plans when they took the PreACT test.



ABOUT ACT

ACT is a mission-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people achieve education and workplace success. Grounded in more than 60 years of research, ACT is a trusted leader in college and career readiness solutions. Each year, ACT serves millions of students, job seekers, schools, government agencies, and employers in the U.S. and around the world with learning resources, assessments, research, and credentials designed to help them succeed from elementary school through career.

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