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Results of student assessments show need for high expectations as we prepare students for success in colleges and careers

Columbia – Today, State Superintendent of Education Molly M. Spearman released the results of the ACT assessments given to SC students for the first time during Spring 2015. All SC 11th graders were given The ACT[®], a college readiness exam. All students in grades 3-8 were assessed in English, Reading and Mathematics using the ACT Aspire[®]. Results of SC PASS in Social Studies in Science were also released for students in grades 4-8.

The ACT Plus Writing[®] – SC results

The results of The ACT Plus Writing[®], given to 11th graders, show that fewer than half of SC students are meeting benchmarks showing readiness for college in four subject areas. According to ACT, “the benchmarks are scores on The ACT[®] subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses.”

**Results of The ACT Plus Writing[®]
 Administered to 11th Graders in South Carolina, 2014-15 School Year**

College Course	ACT Subject Area Test	ACT College Ready Benchmark	SC Average Scale Score	% SC Students Meeting Benchmarks
English Composition	English	18	16.5	38.7%
College Algebra	Mathematics	22	18.1	21.6%
Social Sciences	Reading	22	18.3	25.8%
Biology	Science	23	18.1	17.9%
	Composite*	NA	17.9	NA

*Composite scores combine the English, Reading, Math, and Science scores. <https://www.act.org/solutions/college-career-readiness/college-readiness-benchmarks/>

An analysis of the mean score of all 11th graders in SC school districts taking The ACT, the following school districts met the ACT College Ready Benchmarks by subject area:

SC School Districts Meeting ACT College Ready Benchmark based on average performance of all 11th grade students taking The ACT

ACT Subject Area Test	ACT College Ready Benchmark	SC School Districts Meeting Benchmark
English	18	Anderson 1 Dorchester 2 Lexington 1 Lexington 5 York 2 York 4 Governors School for Arts and Humanities Governor School for Math and Science
Mathematics	22	Governor School for Math and Science
Reading	22	Governors School for Arts and Humanities Governor School for Math and Science
Science	23	Governor School for Math and Science

The following school districts had mean composite scores that met or exceeded the state average of 17.9:

Aiken	17.9
Anderson 1	19.0
Beaufort	18.2
Clarendon 3	17.9
Charleston	19.0
Dorchester 2	19.1
Governors School for Arts and Humanities	23.0
Governor School for Math and Science	29.5
Greenville	18.8
Horry	18.3
Lexington 1	19.4
Lexington 5	20.1
Oconee	17.9
Pickens	18.7
Spartanburg 2	18.2
Spartanburg 4	19.1
Spartanburg 5	18.6
Spartanburg 6	18.0
York 1	18.1
York 2	19.4
York 4	21.1

Do other states require students to take a college readiness assessment? If so, how does South Carolina compare with other states?

In addition to South Carolina there are at least 18 other states and the District of Columbia that pay for students to take either The ACT® or the SAT. The assessments offer access to many students who otherwise could not afford the test or open to doors to students who may not have considered postsecondary education. Many of these states use the results of the assessment for accountability purposes, to measure whether students are college ready.

**State Examples and Results
Juniors Taking The ACT® in 2014-15**

State	Average Composite Score
COLORADO	20.1
KENTUCKY	19.4
NORTH CAROLINA	18.6
SOUTH CAROLINA	17.9
MISSISSIPPI	17.6
NEVADA	17.4

Melanie Barton, EOC Executive Director, said that, by administering The ACT® to students in the 11th grade, students who want to pursue a two or four-year college can receive support and remediation during their senior year to be college ready upon graduation. For students who meet or exceed the benchmarks, it is an opportunity to pursue dual enrollment or Advanced Placement courses, which will help parents and student prepare for postsecondary education and possibly reduce the amount of time and costs to graduate from college.

At a statewide level, the results should serve as a warning for South Carolina students, families, and policy makers, particularly as we recruit industry into our state and look at the current and projected education requirements for employment in South Carolina.

A 2013 report published by the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina found that between 2013 and 2030, there will be over half a million jobs created in South Carolina with over half of these jobs requiring some form of higher education either a two or four-year degree. Unfortunately, there is a projected shortage of over 44,000 employees with associate’s degrees and 70,540 with bachelor’s degrees or higher.

“A high school diploma no longer will meet the demands of the 21st century jobs in South Carolina and no longer will provide a living wage for our families,” stated Barton. “The General Assembly and the

Governor should be commended for recognizing that South Carolina had to start with measuring if our students graduating from public schools are ready for the next step, for obtaining a two or four-year degree or industry exam.”

In 2014, the Legislature, with support from Governor Haley, enacted legislation to administer an assessment to all 11th graders that would measure our students’ readiness for college and could be used by students to apply for college, a two or four-year college. (Acts 155 and 200 of 2014). The test selected through State Procurement laws was The ACT Plus Writing®.

ACT Aspire® – SC results

The results of ACT Aspire®, given to students in grades 3-8 in English, Reading, Writing, and Math last Spring show that:

- In English, at least two-thirds of all students at every grade level scored “ready” or “exceeding” on ACT Aspire®, indicating they are on track to be prepared for college when they graduate.
- In Reading, however, less than half of SC students scored “ready” or “exceeding” at every grade level.
- In Mathematics, over half of students in Grade 3 scored “ready” or “exceeding” but only 32 percent of students in Grade 8 qualified for the designation.

The ACT Aspire® tests replaced the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) in ELA, Mathematics, and Writing. She cautioned comparing the ACT Aspire® scores with PASS scores because the tests are much different and more difficult.

"I agree with Superintendent Spearman. As a state, we are raising our expectations for student achievement, stated Barton. “The bar has been raised as we try to give students and families the information they need to find out if students are on track to be successful in college and careers. For example, on SCPASS approximately 70% of students met or exceeded state standards in English language arts and mathematics in 2014.”

	ACT Aspire® English	ACT Aspire® Reading	ACT Aspire® Mathematics
Grade	% Scoring Ready or Exceeding	% Scoring Ready or Exceeding	% Scoring Ready or Exceeding
3	65.1	31.8	58.0
4	67.2	32.8	49.5
5	67.6	33.6	48.2
6	66.3	36.9	53.2
7	70.2	36.9	36.4
8	70.8	46.7	32.0

There are four student readiness levels established for South Carolina on ACT Aspire®:

1. *In Need of Support* - below the low cut
2. *Close* - at or above the low cut and below the benchmark
3. *Ready* - at or above the benchmark and below the high cut
4. *Exceeding* - at or above the high cut at or above the high cut

SC Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS) in Science & Social Studies

In 2014-15, all students in grades 4 through 8 took the PASS assessment in both Science and Social Studies. In the previous school year, students in Grades 4 and 7 took both the Science and Social Studies SCPASS assessment while students in grades 3, 5, 6 and 8 took either the Science or the Social Studies SCPASS assessment. Changes were made to put more emphasis on ensuring students on grade level in third grade were on grade level in reading and mathematics, and classroom teachers wanted all students tested rather than subgroups.

The results are as follows:

- Across all grades, on average, two-thirds of all students met or exceeded grade-level standards in science.
- The percentage of students who met or exceeded state standards in social studies varies from 67.9% to 86.3%. When compared to the prior year, 4th and 8th grade scores showed the largest increase in percentages of students meeting or exceeded state standards in social studies.

% of Students in SC Scoring Met or Exemplary in 2014-15 (Numbers in Parentheses are Results for 2013-14)

Grade	Science	Social Studies
4	69.9 (69.9)	85.3 (83.7)
5	66.3 (68.4)	71.4 (72.0)
6	63.6 (65.7)	77.5 (79.3)
7	68.2 (73.5)	67.9 (67.4)
8	65.2 (69.6)	73.4 (70.1)

Exemplary - The student demonstrated exemplary performance in meeting the grade-level standard.

Met - The student met the grade-level standard.

Not Met - The student did not meet the grade-level standard.

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.