



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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Statewide ACT results show severe disconnect between student aspirational goals and college preparedness

Columbia – Today, the results of The ACT® assessment for the South Carolina 2016 high school graduates were released, showing that 14 percent of high school graduates are meeting the college ready benchmarks in English, Reading, Mathematics, and Science. The average ACT composite score of 18.5 for SC students fell short of the national average score of 20.8. While the percentage of students meeting college readiness benchmarks is low, 83 percent of South Carolina’s 2016 ACT-tested graduates stated they aspired to attend postsecondary education.

The scores released today are the first to reflect the requirement for every South Carolina student to take the college readiness exam in the 11th grade. 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.”

“We simply cannot stand by and let data of this magnitude go unnoticed,” stated Neil Robinson, Chairman of the EOC. “While it is nice to see that the majority of students want to pursue their dreams of going to college, the fact is that they are not prepared for what awaits them.”

In 2014, the Legislature, with support from Governor Haley, enacted legislation to administer an assessment to all 11th graders that would measure students’ readiness for college and could be used by students to apply for a two or four-year college. The test selected was The ACT.

Robinson asserts that this “meaningful baseline” shows we have to make corrections to a “broken system” before we can expect different results. “South Carolina has never turned its back on a challenge, and now is not the time for that to change,” stated Robinson. “We are doing a disservice to the students and families of this state if we don’t sound the alarm, especially since almost half of our students lose their LIFE scholarships after the first year of college. First and foremost, we need a coherent continuum of assessments in the state that alerts educators and families long before high school that a student is not on a path leading toward college and career readiness.”

A recent report given to the EOC from the SC High School Task Force pointed to the current assessment system as an example of something that needs urgent overhaul. According to the report, “the next high school assessment chosen to measure a students’ high school content proficiency should be reliable, valid, and rigorous and of merit in other states.”

Parents, guidance counselors and students also need to ensure that students are taking college and career ready courses to prepare them for success. A recent national study by Education Trust found that almost half of high school graduates complete neither a college nor career-prep course of study.

**Results of The ACT Plus Writing®
2016 South Carolina High School Graduates**

College Course	ACT Subject Area Test	ACT College Ready Benchmark	SC Average Scale Score 2016	% SC Students Meeting Benchmarks 2016
English Composition	English	18	17.3	44.0%
College Algebra	Mathematics	22	18.5	25.0%
Social Sciences	Reading	22	19.0	30.0%
Biology	Science	23	18.6	21.0%
	Composite*	NA	18.5	NA

*Composite scores combine the English, Reading, Math, and Science scores. <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/education-and-career-planning/college-and-career-readiness-standards/benchmarks.htm>

Frequent Questions

Are there benefits to students and parents for requiring all students to take the ACT in the 11th grade?

According to Melanie Barton, Executive Director of the EOC, there are benefits to requiring students to take the ACT before 12th grade. An additional 1,369 students this year met all four benchmarks of college readiness, compared to last year. If a student wants to pursue postsecondary education but did not score well enough on the ACT in the 11th grade, the student can retake the ACT and improve their score. Ninety-five percent of African American students who tested at least twice and who first tested in their junior year increased their score by one point and scored three points higher than 11th grade African American students who tested only once. In SC there were 7,087 fee waivers issued and 5,295 of those were used. ACT provides students fee waivers to provide more access to students.

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 19 other states where at least 94 percent of graduates are tested using The ACT. Many of these states use the results of the assessment for accountability purposes, to measure whether students are college ready.

2016 State Percent of High School Graduates Tested, Average Composite Score and Percent Meeting Benchmarks by Subject

State	Percent of Graduates Tested	Average Composite Score on The ACT
Alabama	100	19.1
Colorado	100	20.6

Illinois	100	20.8
Kentucky	100	20.0
Louisiana	100	19.5
Michigan	100	20.3
Minnesota	100	21.1
Mississippi	100	18.4
Missouri	100	20.2
Montana	100	20.3
Nevada	100	17.7
North Carolina	100	19.1
North Dakota	100	20.3
South Carolina	100	18.5
Tennessee	100	19.9
Utah	100	20.2
Wisconsin	100	20.5
Wyoming	100	20.0
Arkansas	96	20.2
Hawaii	94	18.7

Can we attribute the differences to high rates of poverty in South Carolina compared to our peers?

Barton asserts that South Carolina’s low level of achievement on the ACT as compared to our peers in the region, is not attributable to poverty. According to the *SREB Fact Book on Higher Education, 2015*, published by the Southern Regional Education Board, the poverty rates for children in our region are comparable for states that assess all students using The ACT. Poverty level is defined as a four-person family with an annual income at or below \$23,834.

State	Poverty Rates Among Children (2013)
Mississippi	34%
Arkansas	29%
Louisiana	28%
South Carolina	28%
Alabama	27%
West Virginia	27%
Georgia	27%
Tennessee	27%
Kentucky	25%
North Carolina	25%
Texas	25%
Florida	25%
Oklahoma	24%
Delaware	18%
Virginia	16%
Maryland	14%
SREB States	26%

States in **BOLD** assess 96% or more students with ACT.

Do all high school graduates need to be college ready?

All high school graduates do not need to be college ready, according to Barton. However, all students need to graduate college or *career* ready. National and state data show that by 2030 two-thirds of all jobs in South Carolina will require at least a two-year or postsecondary degree or credential. Studies predict that if the percentage of students not ready for postsecondary education does not significantly increase, there will be shortages in the following industries: health care, management, education, computers and mathematics, and business and financial operations. Barton states that it is also concerning that half of the jobs of the future are in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The recent ACT report states that only ten percent of South Carolina students met the STEM benchmark as compared to 20 percent of students nationally. The STEM benchmark is an average ACT score of 26 on the mathematics and science portions of the test.

Are there significant achievement gaps between students?

The ACT release shows significant gaps between the performance of various demographic groups. Approximately 34 percent of our white students met three or more of the benchmarks as compared to 16 percent of our Hispanic students and 5 percent of African American students.

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.

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