



ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Johnny Key, Commissioner

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More Arkansas Graduates Took ACT in High School

LITTLE ROCK — The number of Arkansas public school graduates who took the ACT during high school increased by approximately 25 percent in 2017 compared to the previous year, according to the ACT profile report for the Arkansas public school graduating class of 2017. This is the first graduating class whose results include scores from the statewide administration of the ACT provided to grade 11 students beginning in 2016.

Arkansas has increased participation in the ACT by 35 percent from 2013 to 2017 first through the voluntary universal (VUAA) program, which focused on voluntary school participation, and then through the annual statewide administration of the ACT for students in grade 11, which provides students the option to take the exam as juniors. The state pays the cost of the exams for grade 11 students in public high schools.

“The ACT results for the 2017 public school graduating class represent a new baseline for Arkansas, as this is the first time the statewide administration of the exam is reflected in the scores for the graduating class,” said Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Johnny Key. “As we increase opportunities for students to assess their readiness before graduation, we recognize we still have work to do to ensure every student graduates from high school ready for college, career and community engagement.”

The average ACT scores for the 2017 graduating class reflect a baseline that is lower than prior average scores. This is typical among states (Arkansas is one of 17 states) that have transitioned to providing the ACT for 100 percent of students. The average composite score for the 2017 Arkansas public school graduating class was 19.2.

The total number of public school students meeting all four benchmarks increased by more than 200 students, resulting in a baseline of 16 percent of the graduating class meeting ACT readiness benchmarks in all four areas.

Arkansas’ proposed plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act uses the ACT as one of its measures of School Quality and Student Success. The measures for this indicator focus on each student meeting

important readiness criteria and include quality points for a student's ACT composite score of a 19 or higher and bonus points for students meeting established readiness benchmarks. These indicators, among others, will help schools focus on increasing opportunities that prepare students for success in post-secondary opportunities.

From providing additional ACT preparation resources to ensuring all students have the opportunity to take rigorous classes that prepare them for life beyond high school, ADE and the Departments of Higher Education and Career Education are partnering to transform Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education.

"The State Board of Education has created an incredible opportunity for Arkansas students," said Arkansas Department of Higher Education Director Dr. Maria Markham. "High school students taking the ACT as juniors get a small glimpse of the academic expectations beyond high school and a chance to challenge themselves. It is important to note that performance on the ACT exam is not the only predictor of educational success. Colleges and universities are free to base admission and placement on a variety of measures so students who did not score as well as they hoped may still have pathways for college. Arkansas students have plenty of opportunities to work and study hard and achieve a degree or credential."

"The Department of Career Education has numerous resources to help students with ACT testing and a post-secondary track after high school," said Arkansas Department of Career Education Director Dr. Charisse Childers. "In the next few years, 65 percent of all jobs nationally will require post-high school education and training, and career and technical education provides professional certification and apprenticeship programs that can lead to high-paying, in-demand jobs needed right here in Arkansas."

To help students improve their test scores, the Department of Career Education's Career Coach Program offers an ACT Academy for students who score below a 19 on the English, Reading and/or Math section of the ACT and who want to improve their scores. The ACT Academy is held during the two weeks leading up to the national test date, with courses taking place during the evenings and over one weekend.

Additional resources include cost waivers for low-income students that allow them to take the ACT at no cost to the student. According to ACT, the average composite score of 2017 Arkansas graduates (including public and private school graduates) who took the test two or more times was 21.1, compared to 16.5 for graduates who took the test one time.

WorkKeys, which is the certification assessment to earn the Career Readiness Certificate, is another resource for students. The ACT Aspire Supplemental Scores Report includes a Progress Toward Career Readiness indicator that illustrates the student's progress toward a gold level Career Readiness Certificate. By earning this certificate, potential workers can demonstrate to future employers that they possess the basic workplace skills needed for workplace success. Arkansas students may earn this credential in high school when enrolled in the College & Career Readiness or Career Ready 101 Online courses.

To access these resources and to learn more, visit the following websites.

- Arkansas Department of Education: <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/assessment/the-act>
- Arkansas Department of Higher Education: <http://www.adhe.edu/students-parents/>

- Arkansas Department of Career Education: <http://arcareereducation.org/services/career-technical-education/career-coach-program>
- The ACT Profile Report for Arkansas: <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/student-assessment/test-scores/year?y=2017>

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