

# Expanding Opportunities

A College Choice Report for the  
Graduating Class of 2014

## Part 1: Preferences and Prospects



**ACT**<sup>®</sup>

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.

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



The *College Choice Report* is an annual report series that follows an ACT-tested high school graduating class from high school through the second year of college. It focuses on an alternating set of student characteristics, preferences, and college search behaviors to assist enrollment managers, admissions personnel, and other college administrators with student recruitment, enrollment, and persistence.

This *College Choice Report* is part of a report cycle that focuses on a particular ACT-tested high school graduating class. Other reports in this cycle are *The Condition of College & Career Readiness*, which highlights the academic readiness of high school graduates to enter college or career training, and *The Reality of College Readiness*, which highlights the relationships among readiness, college enrollment, and retention.

# College Choice Report: Expanding Opportunities

## ACT-Tested Class of 2014

This *College Choice Report* series follows the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2014, focusing on specific testing behaviors that may expand college opportunities available to students. This is an important topic for enrollment managers and admissions officers to consider, as students' participation in these testing behaviors have implications for colleges' chances to recruit, advise, and place these prospective students.

*Part 1* of this series, *Preferences and Prospects* (released October 2014), provides both 10-year trends and a profile of the current high school graduating class regarding such testing behaviors as the high school grade level in which students first took the ACT® college readiness assessment, the rate at which students elected to send score reports to colleges at the time of ACT registration, and the rate at which students opted into the ACT Educational Opportunity Service (EOS).

*Part 2* of this series, *Enrollment Patterns* (to be released in July 2015), will focus on the college enrollment of these ACT-tested high school graduates and addresses the relationships between the attributes of colleges attended (e.g., selectivity, control, level, and location) and student testing behaviors such as time of first testing, participation in EOS, and score-sending behavior.

### Key Findings from Part 1

The following key findings are summarized in this report:

- More high school students than ever before take the ACT.
- Students are taking the ACT earlier in high school.
- More students withhold their test scores during ACT registration.
- Additional score reports are rising, and most are sent by withholders.

- More students take advantage of the ACT Educational Opportunity Service.

For more detailed information about these key findings and the opportunity to view the report interactively by particular geographic regions (nation, region, state) and by student background characteristics (e.g., ACT scores, parents' education level, race/ethnicity), go to [www.act.org/collegechoice](http://www.act.org/collegechoice).

### How to Use This Report

More than half (57%) of the graduating class of 2014 took the ACT during high school. Whether you are searching for prospective students locally or in other parts of the country, a better understanding of the preferences and college choice behaviors of ACT-tested students can improve your marketing and recruitment strategies. The information presented in this report (and in the accompanying online charts and maps) can provide insights and inform discussions on your campus about the desired characteristics and locations of prospective students and your strategies for recruiting them. For colleges that participate in EOS, this information can help you to establish or refine your selection criteria to create more efficient student searches. Over time, the report can also help you gauge the effectiveness of your search, marketing, and recruitment strategies.

### Sources

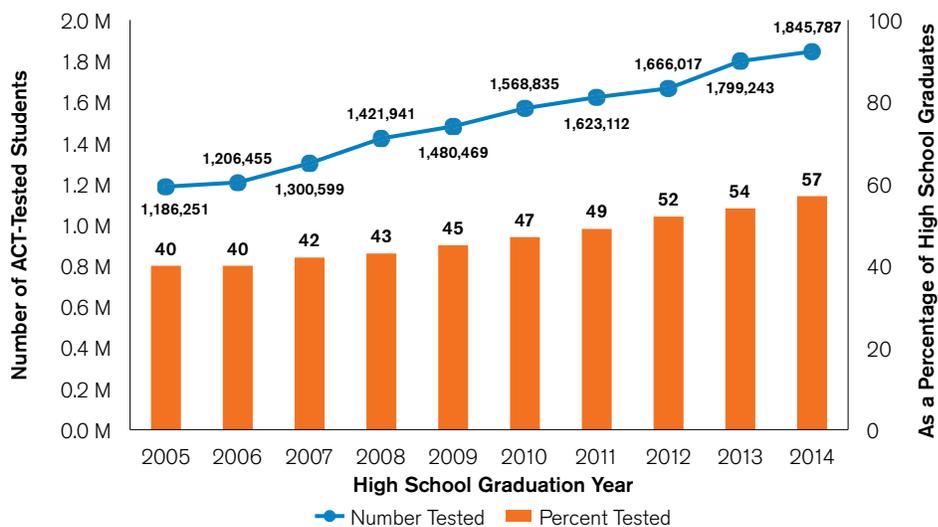
This report is based on the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2014. Student information provided in this report—such as students' background characteristics, grade level at time of testing, ACT scores, college choices, and participation in EOS—is collected when students register for and take the ACT.

## Key Findings

### More High School Students Than Ever Before Take the ACT

Over the past 10 years, the number of high school graduates taking the ACT has increased by 56%, from 1.18 million students in 2005 to 1.84 million students in 2014 (see Figure 1). One-third of this growth is due to the adoption of the ACT as a statewide assessment program in nine states (i.e., Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming).<sup>\*</sup> The other two-thirds of this growth is due to increases in the number of ACT-tested students within 37 other states and the District of Columbia, with the largest increases found in Florida, California, and Texas.

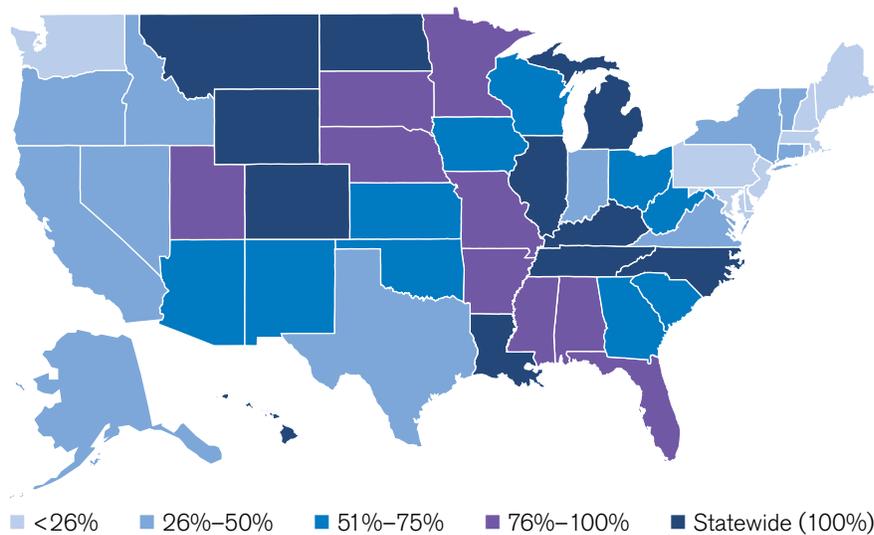
Figure 1. ACT-Tested Students, 2005–2014



Ten-year growth in the number of ACT-tested students has far outpaced growth in the number of high school graduates in the country. In 2005, roughly two out of five high school graduates (40%) took the ACT. By 2014, roughly three of five high school graduates (57%) took the ACT (see Figure 1). An increase in the share of students taking the ACT is also evident in 47 states and the District of Columbia. Despite this growth, there are still considerable differences in ACT participation rates by state (see Figure 2). In particular, states in the Northeast and West tend to have lower ACT participation rates than states in the Midwest and South.

<sup>\*</sup>Colorado and Illinois have administered the ACT statewide since 2001.

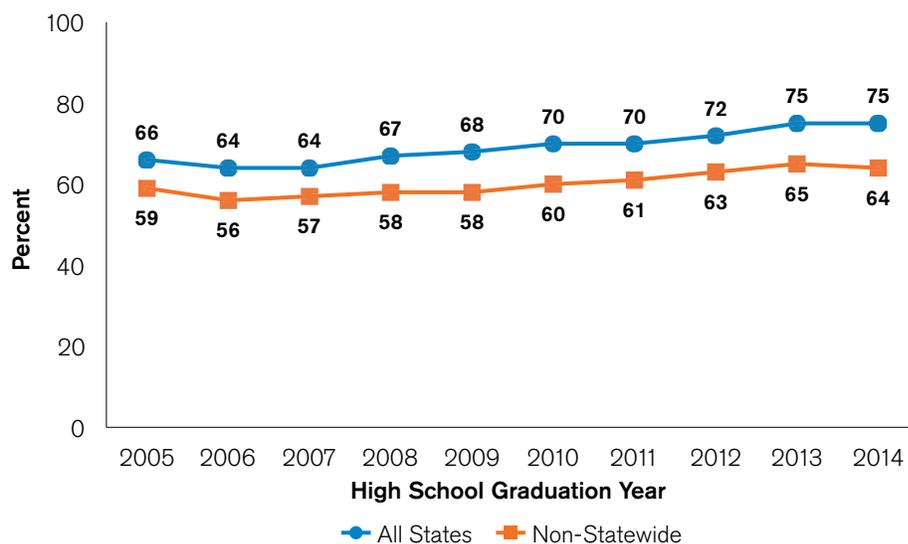
**Figure 2. State ACT Participation Rate, 2014**



### Students Are Taking the ACT Earlier in High School

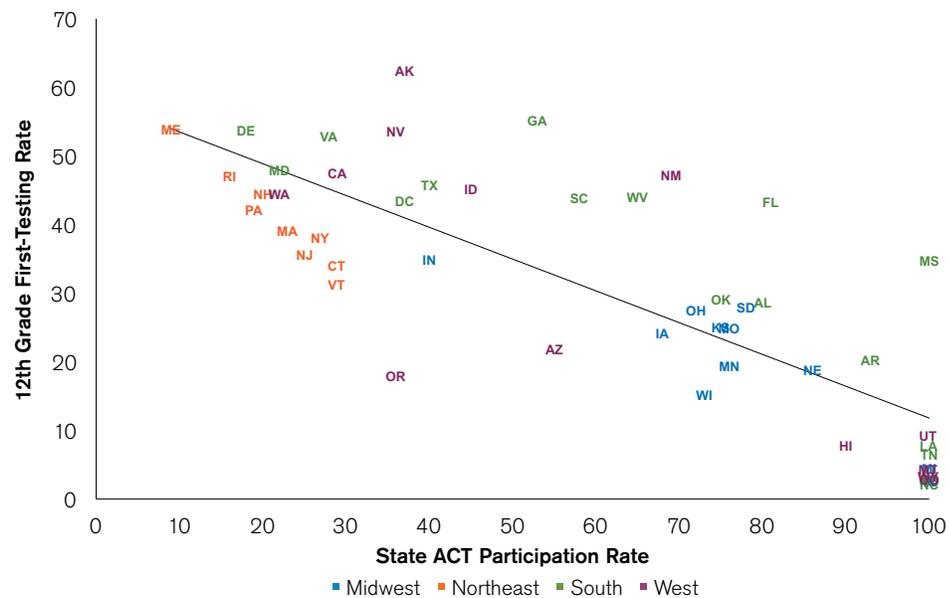
As more students take the ACT in preparation for college, a greater share of them are taking the test earlier in their high school careers. In 2005, two out of three students took the ACT for the first time before the 12th grade. By 2014, three out of four students first tested before the 12th grade. This upward trend in the share of students testing earlier in high school is explained only in part by the administration of the ACT to all 11th graders in nine new states over the past decade. Even across states that have not administered the ACT statewide, the share of students who first tested before the 12th grade has increased from 59% to 64% between 2005 and 2014.

**Figure 3. Percent Testing Before 12th Grade, 2005–2014**



This upward trend is evident across all regions of the country, especially within states that have had a relatively large increase in ACT participation rates. Over the past decade, there has been a consistently strong negative relationship between a state's ACT participation rate and the grade level in which students first take the ACT, such that students in states with lower participation rates generally test later and students in states with higher participation rates generally test earlier. Figure 4 shows this relationship for the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2014. As seen in the figure, states with lower ACT participation rates (horizontal axis) tend to have a larger percentage of students first test as 12th graders (vertical axis), whereas states with higher ACT participation rates tend to have a smaller percentage of students first test as 12th graders. States in the Northeast are clustered in the upper-left area of the figure, having both lower participation rates and higher 12th grade first-testing rates. Many states in the Midwest are clustered in the lower-right area of the figure, having both higher ACT participation rates and lower 12th grade first-testing rates.

**Figure 4. 12th Grade First-Testing Rate by State ACT Participation Rate, 2014**



Note: The trend line in Figure 4 shows a negative relationship. A correlation of -0.81 (out of a range of -1 to 1) suggests that the strength of the negative relationship between ACT participation rate and 12th grade first-testing rate is large in magnitude.

Although today's students are generally testing earlier, many students still wait until their senior year to take the ACT for the first time (see Table 1). Students who test for the first time *later* in high school are more likely to be lower achieving and have lower degree aspirations, come from families with less-educated parents and lower incomes, and be members of traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups (i.e., African American, American Indian, and Hispanic).

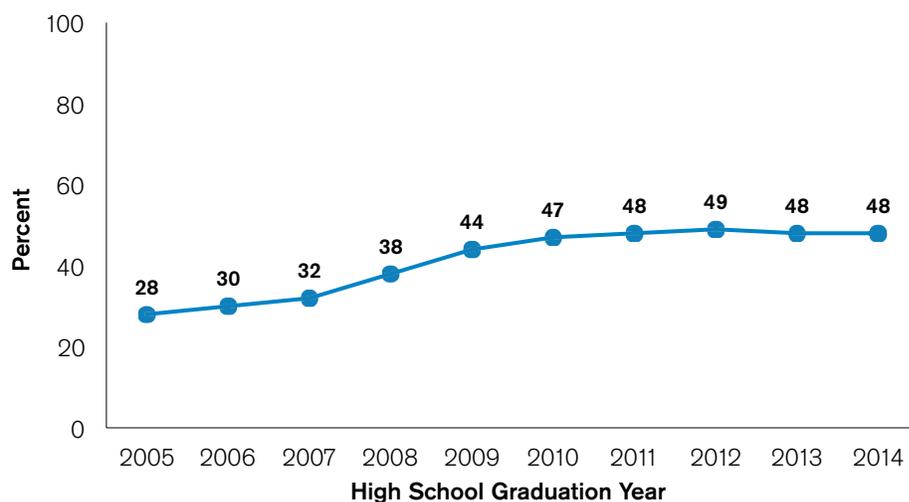
**Table 1. Which Non-Statewide Students Test for the First Time as 12th Graders?**

More Likely to First Test in 12th	Less Likely to First Test in 12th
Lower-achieving students	Higher-achieving students
Students with lower degree aspirations	Students with higher degree aspirations
Students with lower family incomes	Students with higher family incomes
Students with less highly educated parents	Students with more highly educated parents
African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics	Students from other racial/ethnic groups

## More Students Withhold Their Test Scores During ACT Registration

As part of the standard registration fee for the ACT, students can list on the registration form up to four colleges or scholarship agencies to which their scores will be sent. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of students who did *not* send their test scores to any college or scholarship agency when they registered for the ACT increased by 162%, a rate that has outpaced the growth in the number of ACT-tested students over that time. In 2005, roughly three out of 10 ACT-tested students withheld their test scores on a least one test date (see Figure 5). By 2014, nearly half of all ACT-tested high school graduates withheld their test scores on at least one test date. This upward trend in the number and share of students who choose not to send their ACT scores at time of registration cannot be explained by the adoption of statewide testing in the nine new states. Indeed, this upward trend is even more pronounced across states that have *not* adopted the ACT statewide. In fact, this phenomenon is occurring in *every* region of the country and across *all* student achievement levels.

**Figure 5. Percent Withholding Test Scores at Registration, 2005–2014**



Although more students overall are withholding their ACT scores at time of registration, the rate at which students withhold their test scores differs considerably by the ACT participation rate of their state. Figure 6 shows this relationship for the ACT-tested

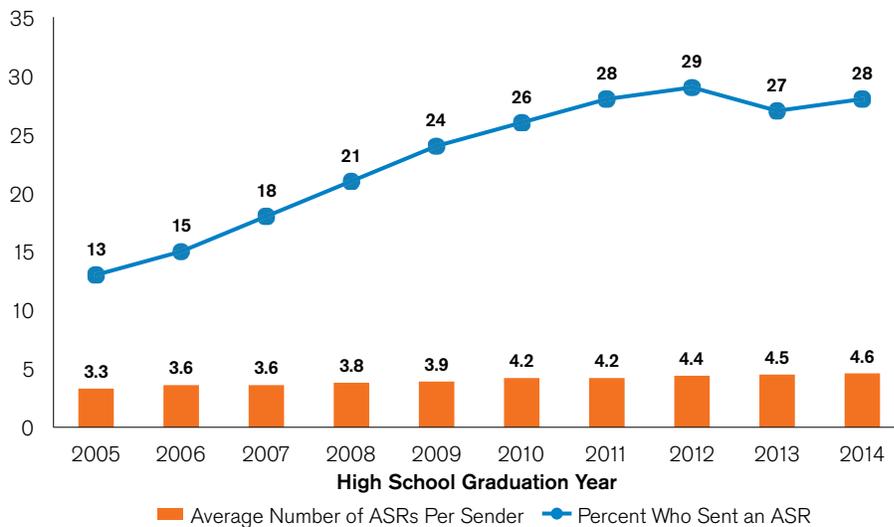


## Additional Score Reports Are Rising, and Most Are Sent by Withholders

An additional score report (ASR) is an official score report that students can send to colleges or scholarship agencies after they have completed the registration process for the ACT. An ASR can be sent in addition to or in lieu of sending test scores at the time of ACT registration, but the fee to send an ASR is not included in the standard registration fee. Over the past 10 years, the number of ACT-tested students who sent at least one additional score report to a college or scholarship agency increased by 232%. In 2005, only one out of eight students sent an ASR; by 2014, the share who sent an additional score report had grown to one out of four students (see Figure 7). A more substantial increase in both the number and share of students who sent at least one ASR to a college or scholarship agency is evident across states that are not administering the ACT statewide.

Not only are more students using the additional score report as a means to send their scores to colleges and scholarship agencies, but the average number of additional score reports being sent by students has also increased. In 2005, students who used the additional score report sent an average of 3.3 ASRs to colleges and scholarship agencies (see Figure 7). By 2014, the per-student average had increased to 4.6 additional score reports.

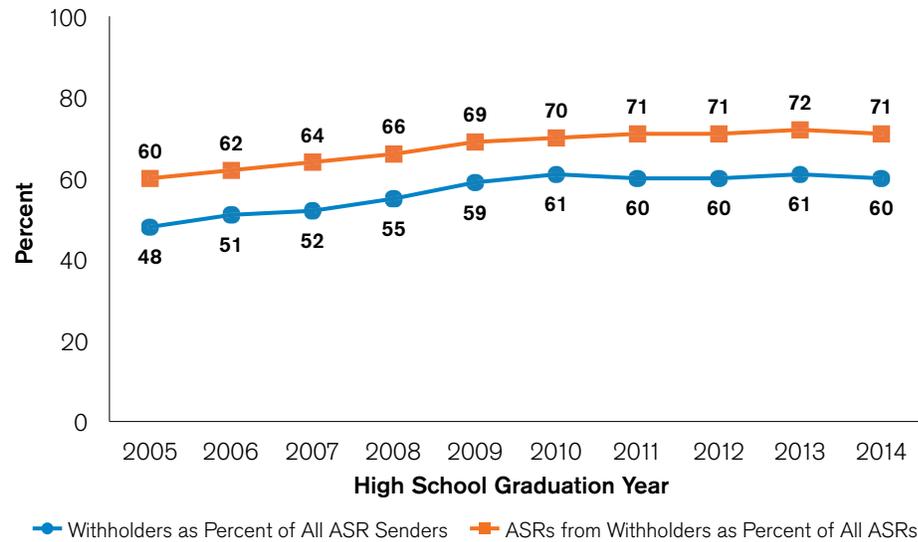
**Figure 7. Additional Score Reports, 2005–2014**



As the number of students who withhold their ACT scores at the time of registration has increased, so has their representation among students who send additional score reports. Three out of five additional score report senders in 2014 withheld their test scores at the time of registration, compared to just under half of all ASR senders

in 2005 (see Figure 8). The representation of students who withhold their ACT scores at registration is also increasing as a percentage of all additional score reports sent. In 2005, three out of five ASRs were sent by students who had previously withheld their test scores; 10 years later, that share increased to seven out of 10 additional score reports (see Figure 8).

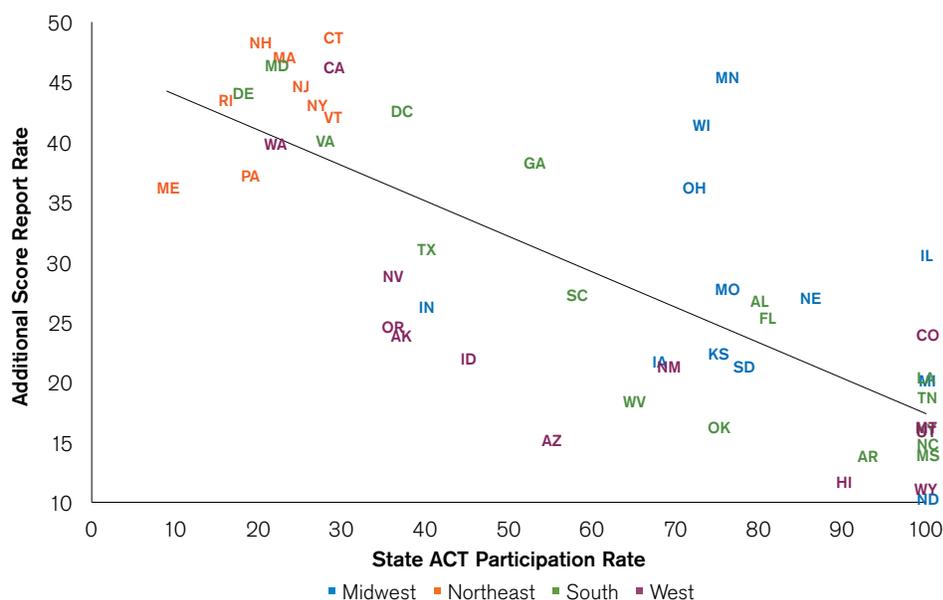
**Figure 8. Withholders and Additional Score Reports, 2005–2014**



The rate at which students make use of additional score reports differs markedly by the ACT participation rate of their state. Figure 9 shows this relationship for the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2014. As seen in the figure, states with lower ACT participation rates (horizontal axis) tend to have a larger share of students who send additional score reports after registration for the ACT (vertical axis), whereas states with higher ACT participation rates tend to have a smaller share of students who send ASRs. States in the Northeast are clustered in the upper-left area of the figure, having both lower ACT participation rates and higher rates of sending additional score reports. A few Midwestern states—Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ohio—are outliers in that these states have both higher ACT participation rates and higher rates of sending ASRs. With a few exceptions (i.e., California and Washington), Western states tend to have lower additional score report rates, regardless of their ACT participation rate.

The rate at which students make use of additional score reports also differs by students' achievement level, educational aspirations, and a number of their background characteristics (see Table 3). Specifically, students who send at least one ASR are more likely to be higher achieving and have higher degree aspirations, come from families with more highly educated parents and higher incomes, live within large suburban areas, and be either Asian or White.

**Figure 9. Additional Score Report Rate by State ACT Participation Rate, 2014**



Note: The trend line in Figure 9 shows a negative relationship. A correlation of -0.77 (out of a range of -1 to 1) suggests that the strength of the negative relationship between the ACT participation rate and the additional score report rate is large in magnitude.

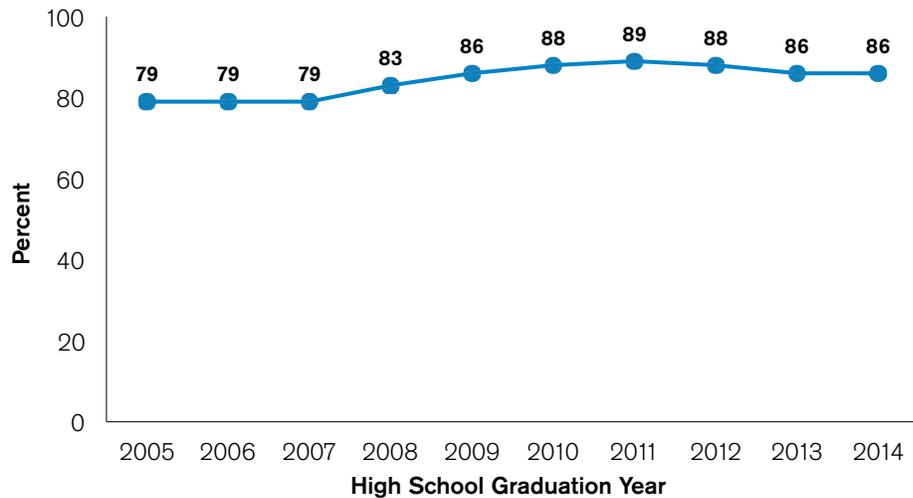
**Table 3. Who Sends Additional Score Reports?**

More Likely to Send ASRs	Less Likely to Send ASRs
Higher-achieving students	Lower-achieving students
Students with higher degree aspirations	Students with lower degree aspirations
Students from higher-income families	Students from lower-income families
Students with more highly educated parents	Students with less highly educated parents
Students in large suburban areas	Students in urban, small suburban, and rural areas
Asians, Whites	Students from other racial/ethnic groups

## More Students Take Advantage of the ACT Educational Opportunity Service

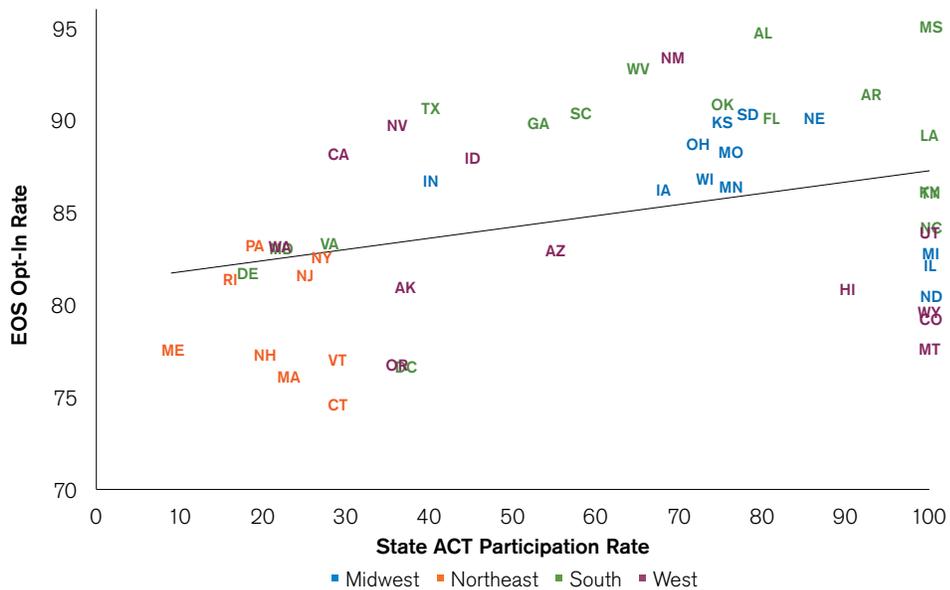
Students can opt into the ACT Educational Opportunity Service (EOS) when they register for the ACT. EOS provides students with information about educational opportunities and scholarships by making their names available to colleges and scholarship agencies that meet EOS eligibility guidelines. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of students who have opted into EOS has increased by 71%, a rate that has outpaced the growth in the number of ACT-tested students over that time. As a result, the share of ACT-tested students who enter the EOS pool has increased from 79% to 86% over the past 10 years (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Percent Opting Into EOS, 2005–2014**



As with other testing behaviors discussed in this report, the rate at which students opt into EOS differs by the ACT participation rate of their state. Figure 11 shows the relationship between states' ACT participation rates and the rate at which students in those states opt into EOS. As seen in the figure, states with lower ACT participation rates (horizontal axis) tend to have lower EOS opt-in rates (vertical axis), whereas states with higher ACT participation rates tend to have higher EOS opt-in rates. Many states located in the Midwest are clustered in the upper-right area of the figure, having both higher participation rates and higher EOS opt-in rates. States located in the Northeast are mostly clustered in the lower-left area of the figure, characterized by both lower ACT participation rates and lower EOS opt-in rates.

**Figure 11. EOS Opt-In Rate by State ACT Participation Rate, 2014**



Note: The trend line in Figure 11 shows a positive relationship. A correlation of 0.35 (out of a range of -1 to 1) suggests that the strength of the positive relationship between the ACT participation rate and the EOS opt-in rate is moderate in magnitude.

Although the majority of today's high school students are opting into EOS, some elect not to participate in this service (see Table 4). Among those who are less likely to take advantage of EOS are students who achieve at either the highest or lowest levels academically, aspire to earn less than a bachelor's degree, live in large suburban areas, come from families with more highly educated parents and higher incomes, do not report their race/ethnicity, and are male.

**Table 4. Who Does Not Opt Into EOS?**

<b>Less Likely to Opt Into EOS</b>	<b>More Likely to Opt Into EOS</b>
The very highest- and lowest-achieving students	Students at other achievement levels
Students with lower degree aspirations	Students with higher degree aspirations
Students in large suburban areas	Students in urban, small suburban, and rural areas
Students from high-income families	Students from low-income families
Students with more highly educated parents	Students with less highly educated parents
Students who do not report their race/ethnicity	African Americans and Hispanics
Male students	Female students

## Recommendations

### *For college admissions personnel*

- Monitor and consider the implications of both the historic trends and future state policy changes that impact the ACT participation rates in your state and other states in which you recruit ACT-tested students. For example, between the 2013 and 2014 graduating classes, Hawaii's ACT participation rate increased from 40% to 90% due to a recent policy decision to administer the ACT to all public high school 11th graders in the state. ACT research has consistently found that students from states with lower ACT participation rates tend to have different background characteristics, achievement levels, college preferences, and test-taking behaviors (e.g., opting into EOS, sending test scores) than students from states with higher ACT participation rates.
- Be strategic about the timing with which you select names and the parameters you use to make your selections through EOS. More students are taking the ACT, deciding to test earlier, and opting into EOS, and these trends have implications on the size and characteristics of the EOS pool at different times in the academic year. Take special note that in states not administering the ACT statewide, students who are traditionally underserved by colleges (e.g., first-generation students, lower-income students, and students from racial/ethnic minority groups) are more likely than other students to test later in high school.

- Make it clear to prospective students how scores from multiple test dates are evaluated in admissions decisions at your institution. For example, your institution may use scores from all test dates provided, the test date with the highest scores, scores from the most recent test date, or some other variation. More students are electing to withhold their ACT scores during registration and send them at a later date. When students withhold their scores, you lose an opportunity to more actively recruit the student (especially if score sending is the first contact that the student has with your college). When students rely on additional score reports, you also lose information about your college's rank in each student's choice set, and past ACT research has shown that a college's ranking in the choice set has historically been one of the best predictors of the student's enrollment at that college.

### *For high school counselors*

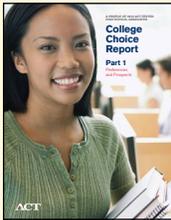
- Encourage students to take full advantage of the opportunity to send their test scores to up to four colleges or scholarship agencies as part of the ACT registration process. Sending ACT scores during registration is viewed by colleges as an expression of student interest in the school; it provides colleges with a chance to reach out sooner to interested students, giving students more timely information and time to weigh their postsecondary options.
- Learn and help students to understand the different approaches that colleges take in evaluating scores from multiple test dates in admissions decisions. Although there may be a few specific colleges and students for which the delay in sending test scores is a reasonable strategy, withholding test scores as a universal strategy would be disadvantageous for many students and colleges.
- Recommend that students opt into the ACT Educational Opportunity Service. Past ACT research has shown that the median distance between a student's home and his or her college is about 50 miles. Students may not be aware of the numerous postsecondary opportunities available to them, especially those that are located farther from home. The additional information they receive from colleges may lead to a better-informed decision or a better-fitting postsecondary environment.
- Encourage students to take the ACT earlier in high school as part of their educational and career planning and preparation. In addition to providing colleges with information that can assist with recruiting, advising, and course placement, results from the ACT can help students identify academic strengths and weaknesses, explore educational and career interests, and prepare to meet their educational and career goals. Although it's important for all students, early testing may be of particular benefit to students who are traditionally underserved by colleges (e.g., first-generation students, lower-income students, and students from racial/ethnic minority groups), as these students tend to test later and may need additional guidance in understanding the college preparation and choice process.

# ACT Research

As a nonprofit educational research organization, ACT is committed to producing research that focuses on key issues in education and workforce development. Our goal is to serve as a data resource. We strive to provide policymakers with the information they need to inform education and workforce development policy and to give educators the tools they need to lead more students toward college and career success. What follows are some of ACT's recent and most groundbreaking research studies.

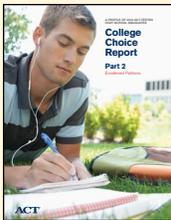
## College Choice Report 2012

### Part 1: Preferences and Prospects



Contains the self-reported college preferences and EOS participation rates of the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2012.

### Part 2: Enrollment Patterns



Examines college enrollment trends of the ACT-tested high school graduating class of 2012, focusing on student mobility, how college choices match preferences, and student enrollment rates.

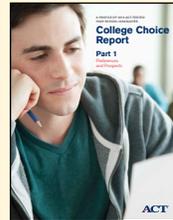
### Part 3: Persistence and Transfer



Reports on student persistence within postsecondary education and examines the relationships between students' reported college preferences and their transfer patterns.

## College Choice Report 2013

### Part 1: Preferences and Prospects



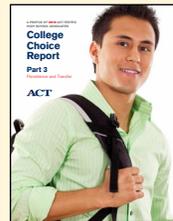
Focuses on students' choice and certainty of planned major, Interest-Major Fit, best-fitting major, and selection of major.

### Part 2: Enrollment Patterns



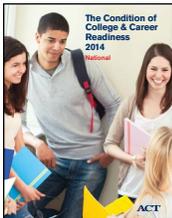
Focuses on college enrollment, consistency of college major choice, persistence within majors, and changes in Interest-Major Fit.

### Part 3: Persistence and Transfer (Spring 2015)



Focuses on student persistence within majors between the first and second year of college, changes in Interest-Major Fit among students who changed majors, and the relationship between Interest-Major Fit and student persistence.

## The Condition of College & Career Readiness



Highlights the college and career readiness of the ACT-tested high school class of 2014. This report is updated annually. [www.act.org/newsroom/data/2014/](http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2014/)

## The Reality of College Readiness



Identifies the enrollment and migration status of ACT-tested high school graduates, including data for two- and four-year colleges and percentages of students meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. [www.act.org/readinessreality/13/](http://www.act.org/readinessreality/13/)

In addition to the printed national reports for this series, we are providing interactive charts and maps online that allow you to view and compare information. This interactive format gives you an opportunity to customize and expand your view of the report content to better address your information needs. To view this content, go to [www.act.org/collegechoice](http://www.act.org/collegechoice).

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

