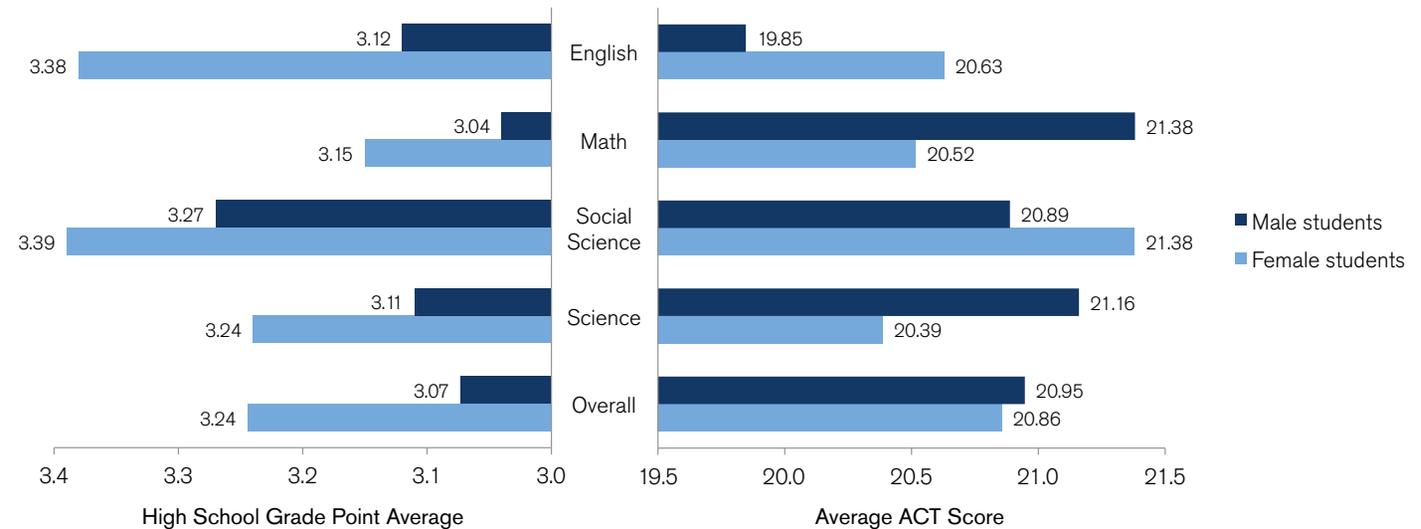


Female students who graduated from high school in 2013 averaged higher grades than their male counterparts in all subjects, but male graduates earned higher scores on the math and science sections of the ACT.

Gender Gaps in High School GPA and ACT Scores

RICHARD BUDDIN

High School Grade Point Average and ACT Test Score by Subject and Gender



Note: Data come from 1,799,243 ACT-tested students who expected to graduate from high school in 2013.

Female high school students earn higher grades than their male peers. The gender gap is particularly large in English, but female students also earn higher grades in math, social science, and science courses.

The differences between male and female students' scores on achievement tests (as measured by scores on the ACT® college readiness assessment) are much less consistent than the differences seen in grades. While female students outperform male students in English and social sciences, male students have higher achievement levels in math and science. The overall or composite scores of male and female students are quite similar.

Although both grades and test scores measure academic achievement, they may delineate different components of it. Grades

reflect day-to-day performance in an academic discipline, but students are often rewarded or punished for noncognitive factors that are not direct measures of academic learning. For example, teachers may reduce grades for students with late homework, disruptive behavior, or inattention. Jacob argues that male students get lower grades because they have more behavioral problems and are less interested in school.¹

In contrast, ACT test scores are a point-in-time estimate of academic achievement. Because the ACT excludes items that might create a gender bias, it provides an objective, summative measure of student learning. ■

¹ Brian Jacob, "Where the Boys Aren't: Non-Cognitive Skills, Returns to School and the Gender Gap in Higher Education." *Economics of Education Review* 21 (2002): 589–598.