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SREB

The ACT and SAT: No Longer Just College Admission Tests

Since SREB last reported on college admission tests in 2007, state average scores on the ACT and SAT have fallen for most of the region. One major factor affected the results in SREB states. **The region saw sharp increases in the numbers and percentages of students taking these tests**. But, key to these increases was a shift in state education policies. Several SREB states implemented policies that directly increased participation. Six SREB states now administer the ACT or SAT statewide to all high school students to promote postsecondary readiness and participation. Four of these states along with two other SREB states now use the ACT or SAT for school accountability to measure college and career readiness, a change made when they applied for and received waivers to certain provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. ACT implemented a change in 2013 that affected participation rates as well. It included the scores of students who received accommodations for disabilities in state averages for the first time. It is no wonder that most SREB states saw changes in their college admission testing results from 2008 to 2013.

SREB states adopted key education policies that increased the proportion of seniors taking the ACT and SAT while they were in high school.

The decline in scores over this period is important for policy-makers. After all, in 2012, SREB's revised *Challenge to Lead 2020* goals for education called for SREB states to raise average state scores on the college admission tests to exceed national averages. Even so, the impressive gain in participation is the leading story over the period. The gains in the numbers and percentages of all students taking these tests have extended to minority groups. The percentages of black and Hispanic high school seniors tested on the ACT and the SAT rose at rates higher than it did for white seniors in the SREB region. Both ACT and the College Board reported that the class tested in 2013 is larger than any class since SREB's last college admission test report.

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In the meantime, new legislation or regulation in several SREB states requires many more students to take these tests as part of their school requirements. These changes in the use and purpose of college admission tests are evident in the state stories that follow. This report will explore these changes in SREB state policies and the effects they have on participation and scores in these states. In addition, it will inform policy-makers on how other SREB states use college admission testing.

State average scores and participation rates in SREB states

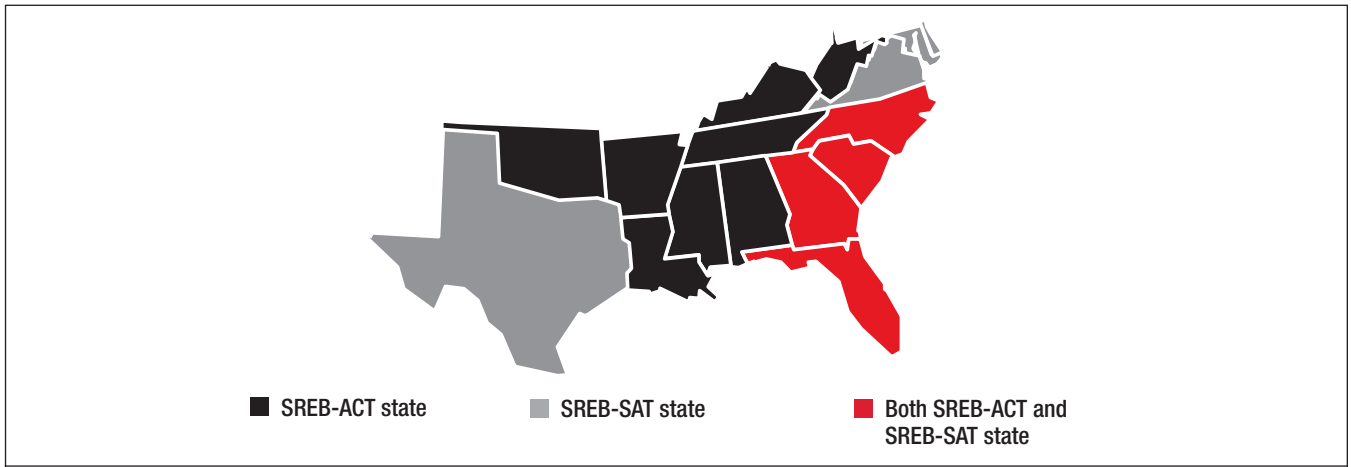
Scores fell nationally, regionally and in most SREB states. From 2008 to 2013, average scores on both the ACT and SAT fell substantially in SREB states and in the nation. For the ACT, for which 0.1 point is considered to be significant, the SREB regional average score fell 0.4 points during the period. At the same time, the national average score for the ACT fell 0.2 points. The ACT score is based on the composite of four subtests (English, math, reading and science), and it is reported as the average of these four subtests. The SREB regional average score for the SAT dropped 25 points during this same time, compared with a 13-point drop for the nation. The SAT score has three components: critical reading, mathematics and writing. The scores reported here are the total of the critical reading and math components. (See Table 1.)

For SREB states, the drop in scores meant most states did not meet the *Challenge to Lead 2020* goal in 2013. Only Virginia topped the national average score on the SAT, its dominant college admission test. Virginia also was the only SREB state to top the national average in 2008.

SREB reports college admission test results for a state if a majority of seniors in the state took the test while they were in high school. It refers to SREB states in which more than 50 percent of graduating seniors took the ACT while they were in high school as SREB-ACT states; likewise, it refers to those in which a majority took the SAT while they were in high school as SREB-SAT states. For four SREB states in 2013, at least 50 percent of graduating seniors took both tests. In 2013, SREB had 12 SREB-ACT states and eight SREB-SAT states. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1

SREB States by Test Dominance, 2013



Note: SREB-ACT states are states in which more than half of all graduates took the ACT while in high school.
SREB-SAT states are states in which more than half of all graduates took the SAT while in high school.

Sources: ACT, Inc., the College Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

Table 1

Change in State Results on College Admission Tests, 2008 to 2013

Average college admission scores fell in most SREB states.

	2008		2013		Change, 2008-2013	
	Average Score	Percentage of Seniors Tested	Average Score	Percentage of Seniors Tested	Score Change	Change in Percentage Tested
SREB-ACT States						
U.S.[1]	**21.1**	**43**	**20.9**	**54**	**-0.2**	**11**
SREB states[2]	**20.4**	**45**	**20.0**	**63**	**-0.4**	**18**
Alabama	20.4	77	20.4	78	0	1
Arkansas	20.6	75	20.2	90	-0.4	15
Florida	19.8	56	19.6	74	-0.2	18
Georgia	20.6	36	20.7	51	0.1	15
Kentucky	20.9	73	19.6	100	-1.3	27
Louisiana	20.3	81	19.5	100	-0.8	19
Mississippi	18.9	91	18.9	95	0	4
North Carolina	21.3	15	18.7	100	-2.6	85
Oklahoma	20.7	68	20.8	75	0.1	7
South Carolina	19.9	43	20.4	51	0.5	8
Tennessee	20.7	78	19.5	100	-1.2	22
West Virginia	20.7	64	20.6	63	-0.1	-1
SREB-SAT States						
U.S.[1]	**1511**	**46**	**1498**	**50**	**-13**	**4**
SREB states[2]	**1491**	**46**	**1466**	**50**	**-25**	**4**
Delaware	1487	68	1351	100	-136	32
Florida	1474	58	1457	67	-17	9
Georgia	1466	68	1452	75	-14	7
Maryland	1498	68	1483	73	-15	5
North Carolina	1489	63	1479	62	-10	-1
South Carolina	1461	60	1436	64	-25	4
Texas	1473	52	1437	59	-36	7
Virginia	1522	70	1528	71	6	1

Note: SREB-ACT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the ACT while in high school. SREB-SAT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the SAT while in high school.

1 U.S. average composite scores reflect all student scores for that test nationwide, not just those from states in which the test is dominant.

2 The SREB average composite scores reflect all student scores for the test in all SREB states, not just those from states in which the test is dominant.

Sources: ACT, Inc. and the College Board

SREB-ACT state results: Three of the 12 SREB-ACT states — Georgia, Oklahoma and South Carolina — saw their state average scores increase from 2008 to 2013. South Carolina experienced the greatest growth among the SREB-ACT states, with an impressive 0.5 point gain over the period. Two others, Alabama and Mississippi, ended the period flat. The other seven states saw declines in their state averages, ranging from -0.1 to -2.6, over the period.

Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia all narrowed the gap with the nation in average state scores. States that had rising or flat scores outpaced the nation's score, which fell 0.2 point. West Virginia's rate decline was slower than the national rate decline, thereby narrowing the score gap with the nation.

No SREB-ACT state topped the national average in 2013. Even though gains in average state scores for three of these states helped them narrow their gap with the nation, no SREB-ACT state met the SREB *Challenge to Lead 2020* goal to close the gap in 2013.

SREB-SAT state results: One of the eight SREB-SAT states, Virginia, improved its average state score from 2008 to 2013. Virginia increased its score 6 points over the period while increasing the percentage of seniors who had taken the SAT while they were in high school.

North Carolina's average composite score fell 10 points, less than the national score decline of 13 points from 2008 to 2013. The other six SREB-SAT states — Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina and Texas — experienced declines in average composite scores that were greater than the drop in the national average.

In all, two SREB-SAT states — North Carolina and Virginia — narrowed the gap with the nation in state average composite scores. Virginia was the only SREB-SAT state to top the national average in 2013, making it the only SREB-SAT state to meet the *Challenge to Lead 2020* goal.

Why did the scores fall? Participation on the ACT and SAT surged from 2008 to 2013 in SREB states. Public school enrollment increased, and high school graduation rates rose significantly during the period. The number of high school graduates and the proportion of those students who took either the ACT or SAT while they were in high school increased in the region over the period. In fact, in every instance except two, SREB states experienced increases in the percentage of graduating seniors who took the state's respective tests.

These increases in the *proportions* of graduating seniors taking the ACT and SAT explain in large measure why scores fell in SREB states. Generally, as a greater proportion takes a college admission test, the state average score drops. This expanding group typically includes as many students as ever who are prepared and motivated for college, but — with the increases — it includes more students who are not as prepared and motivated. It is also important to note that when the percentage of students taking either test is different from one state to another, comparisons among states are ill-advised.

For the SAT, participation in the nation and in the 16 SREB states rose at identical rates. In 2008, 46 percent of all seniors in the United States and in SREB states took the SAT at some point during high school. That participation rate climbed to 50 percent for both the nation and the overall SREB region by 2013.

By 2013, all graduating seniors in Delaware had taken the SAT. Six of the eight SREB-SAT states experienced a rise in participation on the SAT at a rate that met or exceeded the national rate. Those states included: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina and Texas.

For the ACT, the surge in participation in the 16 SREB states overall grew at a faster pace than the nation from 2008 to 2013. The percentage of all graduating seniors in the SREB region who took the ACT while in high school rose by 18 percentage points over the period, while participation in the nation rose 11 points. In 2008, SREB states led the nation — by 2 percentage points — in the percentage of seniors taking the ACT; by 2013, SREB states led by 9 percentage points.

The factor driving the SREB regional growth is that four states — Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee — tested all graduating seniors by 2013. None of the four states tested all graduating seniors of the class of 2008. Three other SREB-ACT states had substantial gains: Florida with an 18 percentage-

point gain; and, Arkansas and Georgia, each with a 15 percentage-point gain. Of all seven states with substantial gains in participation, Georgia stands out as the one also able to increase its average score on the ACT. Six of these seven SREB-ACT states topped the nation in the percentage of graduates tested.

ACT also expanded who it reports in state average scores in 2013. Beginning with the class of 2013, ACT included results for students who took the test with ACT-approved accommodations in the ACT-reported state average score.

ACT's decision to include results for these students in the state average signals its move toward greater access for these students. For the first time, ACT reported these scores as they report all other scores to the students' postsecondary institutions of choice.

Allowable accommodations include extended testing time, alternate test formats, stop-the-clock breaks and multiple-day test administration for select students with professionally diagnosed and documented disabilities. Adding the results for these students to those of other students slightly increased the overall proportion of total seniors included in the ACT state average score reports. In SREB states, the median percentage of students tested in the class of 2013 who received these ACT-approved accommodations and had their scores reported in the state average score was 3 percent, compared with the national average of 4 percent. (See Table 2.)

But, for some SREB states, the percentage of students tested with accommodations on the ACT was greater than for the nation. For instance, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee — states in which 100 percent of seniors took the test — had 5 percent or more of the ACT test-takers in the class of 2013 using ACT-approved accommodations.

Table 2

The Percentage of Graduating Seniors Who Took the ACT With Approved Accommodations, 2013

	Percentage of All Test Takers
U.S.	**4**
SREB states	**3**
Alabama	1
Arkansas	3
Florida	3
Georgia	2
Kentucky	7
Louisiana	6
Mississippi	2
North Carolina	5
Oklahoma	3
South Carolina	1
Tennessee	5
West Virginia	2

Note: Only SREB-ACT states are reported in this table.

Source: ACT, Inc.

After including the results of students with accommodations, seven SREB states saw declines in their state average scores from 2012 to 2013. Kentucky had the largest percentage — 7 percent — of its graduating seniors in 2013 who had taken the ACT while in high school using ACT-approved accommodations. In 2012, before the inclusion of accommodated students, Kentucky's average ACT score was 19.8. In 2013, the state's average score was 19.6. The average score for students who took the test with accommodations in 2013 was 15.4, and for students without accommodations, the average score was 20.0.

New roles for old tests

Historically, college admission tests were used primarily as a measure of a student's ability to succeed in college. Students decided whether to take a college admission test — and chose which one (or both) to take, generally based on the recommendations of prospective colleges. Colleges used their scores to help determine admission decisions, to place students in first-year courses, and to qualify students for merit-based scholarships and grants. Students saw a good score as a ticket to college and greater educational opportunities. Higher average state scores signified to states that students were better prepared for college.

In recent years, many public and private colleges and universities, mostly ones outside the South, have begun to make their admission decisions without using college admission tests. Reportedly, as many as 800 institutions that traditionally have relied on these tests in the admission process now depend on the student's high school record to make admission decisions. A 2014 study of U.S. colleges and universities featured on National Public Radio and on the website of the National Association of College Admission Counselors reports that students' high school records, without college admission test scores, are sufficient to make valid college admission decisions.

Shortly after states began to implement NCLB, new roles began to emerge for traditional college admission tests. College and career readiness and school accountability were national buzz words in K-12 education. With its 2005 report, *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*, ACT embarked on significant efforts to promote a more rigorous core of courses for college-bound students. Both ACT and SAT began to emerge with research and products that responded with information and potential practices to help states measure high school students' readiness for college. States took notice.

Since 2002, SREB has actively promoted college readiness. When the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association proposed new standards (known as Common Core State Standards) for K-12 schools in 2007, the call for more rigorous standards for public schools clearly had taken hold nationwide. Fourteen SREB states adopted the proposed standards, and the other two states revised their standards to ensure that their high school graduates were ready for college and careers. States adopting the new standards initially joined one or both of two consortia — PARCC and Smarter Balanced — established to create new assessments. Some states decided not to wait on the consortia for new assessments, and some of them have recently turned to ACT and SAT to determine if the traditional college admission exams could serve a role in school accountability.

Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee decided to administer the ACT statewide by 2013. These states require all high school juniors to take the ACT during the school day to measure the college and career readiness of their students. Kentucky, the first SREB state to implement mandatory statewide college admission testing legislation, required all juniors in the spring of 2008 to take the ACT. The state also adopted ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS®), which provided testing for eighth- and 10th-graders. Alabama is the most recent; it is phasing in a similar program. All juniors in the state took an in-school electronic version of the ACT in spring 2014. Additionally, Tennessee extends this policy to seniors who missed the opportunity to participate in the mandatory spring testing by offering these students one ACT administration in the senior year.

Six SREB states use the ACT and SAT to measure college readiness for all students.

Delaware provides a school-day administration open to all juniors to take the SAT through a four-year pilot program, although the state does not require all students to take the test. Beginning in 2011, the program in Delaware is part of a larger College Board initiative called the SAT® School Day and draws on federal Race to the Top funding. It is slated to end with the 2013-14 school year. (See Table 3.)

The impact of statewide testing policies on score results is clear. States that fund the ACT or SAT statewide indicate they want to provide students with greater educational opportunities. Yet, when a state's graduating class reflects 100 percent participation for the first time, implementing these policies also likely signal a decline in state average test scores.

This effect of statewide testing was evident in **North Carolina** soon after the state began testing all juniors on the ACT. In 2012, North Carolina was an SREB-SAT state only, with just 20 percent of the seniors taking the ACT. At that time, 67 percent of the graduating class of 2012 had taken the SAT while they were in high school. By 2013, that picture was quite different. All seniors in the class of 2013 had taken the ACT at least once in high school — the previous spring as juniors — and they were all included in the score report for the class of 2013. The state average score dropped from 21.9 to 18.7 from 2012 to 2013.

Table 3

Statewide College Testing Policies in SREB States, 2014

State	Initial Year for Statewide Testing	Test	State Policies Supporting Statewide Testing of Juniors
Alabama	2013-14	ACT	The state established the ACT as one of its college- and career-readiness indicators of high school performance in its request for Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) flexibility. In line with this decision, the state adopted ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS®) for students in eighth, 10th and 11th grade as part of its new education plan, Plan 2020.
Delaware	2010-11	SAT	The state department of education used a portion of its Race to the Top funding to launch a four-year pilot of statewide SAT testing for all juniors.
Kentucky	2007-08	ACT	In 2006, Senate Bill 130 amended KRS 158.6453 to require statewide administration of ACT's EPAS® program for students in eighth, 10th and 11th grade in Kentucky. In 2009, Senate Bill 1 amended KRS 150.6453 to include the ACT as a measure of school and district accountability, beginning in 2011-12. In 2013, the state established the ACT as a college- and career-readiness indicator of high school accountability in its request for ESEA flexibility.
Louisiana	2012-13	ACT	The state adopted ACT's EPAS® testing program statewide for eighth, 10th and 11th graders. The state also adopted the ACT as a college- and career-readiness indicator of high school performance in the state's request for ESEA flexibility.
North Carolina	2011-12	ACT	The state adopted ACT's EPAS® testing program statewide for students in eighth, 10th and 11th grade, and WorkKeys for students in career and technical degree programs. The state adopted the ACT as a college- and career-readiness indicator of high school performance in the state's request for ESEA flexibility.
Tennessee	2008-09	ACT	From 1995 to 2009, the state had a partnership with ACT to provide students with vouchers to take the test on a National Test Day. In 2008-09, Senate Bill 2175 expanded the program to require students statewide to take the ACT during the school day. The state also uses the ACT's EPAS® testing program with eighth- and 10th-graders. Results on EPAS® are included in the state board of education's master plan.

Source: Prepared by SREB

At the same time that ACT scores declined in North Carolina, SAT scores rose. The state average score rose from 1469 to 1479 from 2012 to 2013. During this period of transition, the SAT participation rate for the graduating senior class fell 5 percentage points to 62 percent in 2013.

From 2008 to 2013, North Carolina's policy change resulted in six times as many members of the class of 2013 taking the ACT while in high school as members of the class of 2008, as the number of seniors taking the ACT rose from 13,000 to nearly 96,000 during that time.

A somewhat similar story unfolded in **Delaware**. While Delaware did not transition from one test to the other, it did experience substantial growth in SAT participation. From 2008 to 2013, the percentage of seniors taking the SAT in Delaware rose by 32 percentage points largely resulting from its pilot program. This growth in test participation undoubtedly played a role in the 136-point decrease in the Delaware average composite SAT score over the period.

These six SREB states weighed the benefits of "test-everyone" policies. By adopting statewide testing policies, these states provide equal access to college admission tests for students who otherwise may not have participated in this phase of college preparation. The students who benefit most are high-achieving, low-income students who otherwise would not have paid to take the test. Such students have historically opted out of taking either test, and these policies make it easier for them to opt in.

Because these states offer the test during the school day, they free the students from the financial and transportation burdens of the traditional Saturday

testing administration. Also, in-school administration allows students to take the test in a more comfortable atmosphere — their home school. Taking the test gives them a chance to show their readiness for college. By providing access to all students, high schools can create a college-going culture directed at everyone, which may propel more students toward postsecondary education.

Most states that adopt statewide testing policies for the ACT or SAT do so as a means to assess if students are adequately prepared for college and careers by their junior year. Statewide testing provides administrators a tool to gauge if their schools are effectively preparing students for postsecondary courses. It also provides parents and students with useful feedback on students' level of preparation and chances for success after high school. Because students are tested at the end of their junior year, teachers have one more year to intervene if additional preparation is necessary for the transition to college.

ACT's research has provided states with the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. This research, started in 2004, examines the relationship between results on the four components that make up the ACT composite score and the grades that students earn in four common freshman courses in college. ACT has identified the individual Benchmark scores for each of the components: English, math, reading and science. Its research has shown that the Benchmarks predict success in related freshman courses. In using these scores as specific benchmarks for college readiness, states can profile a student's needs and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their schools' curricula.

SREB-ACT states that seek to track their progress on preparing students for college are advised to use ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks and not rely on ACT's broader state average composite scores. In SREB states, only about one in five students meets all of the Benchmarks. ACT's research shows that much work is ahead as states tackle the task of getting more students ready for college. Having the subject-specific results that the Benchmarks provide is one step forward. (See Box A.)

Teachers can use college admission test results from the junior-year test administration to guide individual, senior-year instruction to fill any gaps in readiness. Many policy-makers and education leaders are hopeful that in-school, junior-year college admission testing will result in targeted instruction in the senior year for students not yet ready for college. (See Box B about an SREB program that prepares seniors for the transition from high school if their junior-year test results show they are not yet ready for postsecondary education.)

Other states offer more local programs. ACT and the College Board have long provided fee waivers for students from low-income households. But, this process is student-initiated and fee waivers are generally for Saturday testing, which challenge students with working parents and limited access to transportation. States with programs in place to fund testing fees of large numbers of students and to administer the test during the regular school day ease the process for all students, including students from low-income households, even if these programs are not statewide.

Arkansas provides such a service for the ACT. School districts in Arkansas can opt into the Voluntary Universal ACT Assessment program, in which the district agrees to pay for one in-school administration of the test during the spring of a student's junior year. These districts use National School Lunch funds to cover registration and testing fees. Arkansas's increase in ACT participation may be related to the state's involvement in this program.

Just as College Board provides for Delaware to pilot statewide testing in school, it also offers the SAT® School Day program to other states as a way to test students during a traditional school day without students paying the testing fees. In fact, it is also available to school districts. In 2011-12, some school districts in **Florida** and **Texas** and some schools in **Maryland** have participated in this program.

The ACT and SAT have also begun to play a role in school accountability. By 2013, as NCLB turned 12 years old without reauthorization, many of its provisions had become outdated. The U.S. Department of Education offered states waivers of some of these provisions, but the department required states to adopt certain education reforms. These reforms included college-readiness programs and new approaches to accountability.

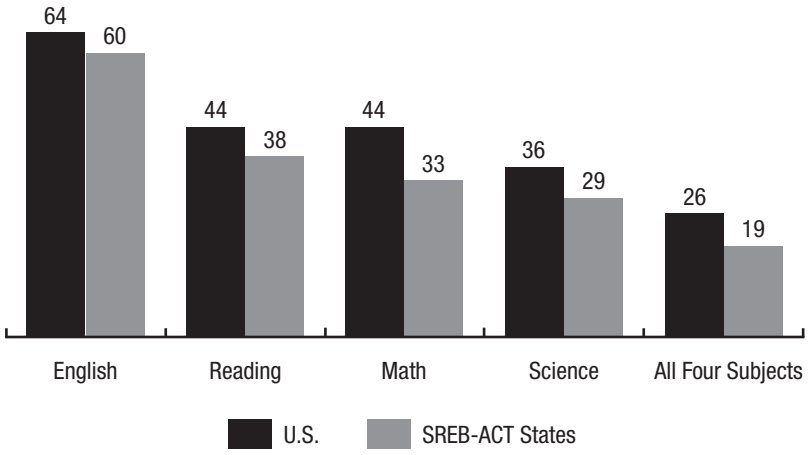
Box A

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

ACT developed measures of college and career readiness — called Benchmarks in English, math, reading and science — by linking assessment results for its college admission test to students' likelihood of earning "B" and "C" grades in freshman college courses. Researchers linked the test results to course grades in English composition, college math, social studies and biology. Those with a 50 percent chance of earning grades of "B" and a 75 percent chance of earning grades of "C" are considered ready for freshman-level course work in related courses.

For 2013, the ACT College Readiness Benchmark score for measuring readiness in reading is 22 (previously 21); for science it is 23 (previously 24). The Benchmark score for English is 18; in math, it is 22. ACT has shown that taking a more rigorous high school curriculum is associated with higher scores on the Benchmarks. Students in SREB-ACT states score lower on the Benchmarks than their peers in the nation. About one in four students in the United States meet all the Benchmarks. In SREB-ACT states, about one in five meets all the Benchmarks. See Appendix A for state-by-state results.

Percentage of High School Seniors Taking the ACT, Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks, 2013



Source: ACT, Inc.

Box B

SREB Literacy Ready and Math Ready

SREB has partnered with 12 SREB states — Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee and West Virginia — to develop two readiness courses, Math Ready and Literacy Ready. These courses target the gap in college and career preparation that holds many students back. These courses are designed for the senior year of high school, and they help students develop the reading, writing and math skills they need to succeed in college or the work place.

States with statewide college readiness testing policies can use college admission test results from the junior year to place underprepared students in such intensive courses during their senior year. Several SREB states are using college admission tests to measure college readiness and place students in high school transition courses.

A particular complaint about NCLB has been that its strong focus on math and reading narrowed curricular focus and weakened attention to other important academic content. As states reformed their curricula to improve college readiness and provide for more ways to hold schools accountable for student achievement, they broadened their curricular focus — for example, to emphasize social studies and science more. And, they looked for new ways to hold schools accountable for making adequate yearly progress on student achievement.

In doing so, six SREB states — Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina and Oklahoma — looked to college admission tests to assess their broader curricula. Four of the states that decided to use the ACT for school accountability also administer it statewide to all students, generally as juniors. Two others, Florida and Oklahoma, do not administer a test statewide. These two states adopted both the ACT and SAT in 2013 as a school accountability measure. It is not clear how or whether these two states will extend their emphasis on these tests for school accountability purposes. SREB's 2014 report on the school accountability waivers provides more information on these waivers and assessment adoptions. (See *SREB States Transform School Accountability with NCLB Waivers*, sreb.org.)

Greater access but wider score gaps for minority students

In recent years, more minority students are taking college admission tests. State-funded college admission test administrations have been beneficial to traditionally underrepresented groups. The numbers of black and Hispanic high school graduates who participated in both the SAT and ACT rose at faster rates than the numbers for white seniors in SREB states from 2008 to 2013.

In SREB states, the number of black students who took the SAT while in high school rose 25 percent from 2008 to 2013, and the number of Hispanic students rose 53 percent. Black and Hispanic students experienced tremendous growth; the number of white students who took the SAT in the SREB region remained relatively flat.

While the increases in black and Hispanic students who took the SAT in the region is impressive, the numbers of these seniors who took the ACT while in high school in SREB states grew even faster. The number of black seniors who took the ACT while in high school in SREB states grew 48 percent from 2008 to 2013. The number of Hispanic students who took the ACT in SREB states more than doubled over the same period, compared with a 32 percent increase in the number of white students. (See Table 4.)

Black and Hispanic students represent a greater proportion of students taking college admission tests. Not only are the numbers of black and Hispanic graduating seniors taking college admission tests while in high school increasing in most SREB

States at a Glance

- In Florida, 14 percent of graduates who took the **SAT** while in high school were black and 18 percent were Hispanic in 2008. By 2013, the proportion of black seniors had increased to 17 percent of the senior class and Hispanic seniors to 21 percent.
- Florida had the largest increase among **SREB-ACT states** in the proportion of Hispanic seniors taking the test — an increase of 8 percentage points over the period.
- From 2008 to 2013, Delaware's proportion of black graduates who took the test rose by 6 percentage points — the greatest gain among minority groups in any **SREB-SAT state**. Delaware's statewide SAT administration for the class of 2013 undoubtedly contributed to the boost in black students' participation.

Table 4

Percent Change in Numbers of High School Graduates Taking College Admission Tests While in High School By Racial and Ethnic Group, 2008 to 2013

In the SREB region, the numbers of black and Hispanic students taking the ACT and SAT are rising faster than for white students.

	ACT			SAT		
	2008	2013	Percent Change 2008-2013	2008	2013	Percent Change 2008-2013
Black	102,525	151,868	48	93,469	117,189	25
Hispanic[1]	46,437	106,617	130	42,506	64,873	53
White	292,261	386,407	32	284,938	284,464	-0.2

[1] ACT reports Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican student groups together as part of the larger Hispanic/Latino group. SAT reports the Mexican or Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups separately from the Hispanic or Latino group.

Sources: ACT, Inc. and the College Board

states, they are also becoming a *larger proportion* of the seniors who take these tests. In particular, the proportion of Hispanic students taking the ACT and SAT is growing across the region.

- In all eight SREB-SAT states, black and Hispanic students in the class of 2013 represent a larger proportion of the seniors who took the test while they were in high school than in the class of 2008.
- The proportion of Hispanic students in the senior class who took the ACT while in high school rose from 2008 to 2013 in all 12 SREB-ACT states.
- During the same period, the proportion of black students in the senior class who took the ACT while they were in high school increased in six SREB-ACT states. (See Table 5 on page 12.)

The growth in students taking the ACT and SAT is due, in part, to demographic changes in the region since 2008. While researchers projected the number of white high school graduates in SREB states to decline by 5 percent from 2008 to 2013, they projected the number of black graduates to rise slightly — up 3 percent over the period. They projected the number of Hispanic high school graduates to rise sharply, by 36 percent, over the same period. This increase in the number of Hispanic graduates is expected to continue beyond 2013. (See Table 6 on page 13.)

These increases in the numbers and proportions of minority students taking the tests are important, because these students have historically not enrolled in college at the same rates as white students. Likewise, these minority students are often from low-income families and without the same access to college admission tests. For states to meet their college-going and college-completion goals, more of these students need to plan for and go to college. Taking college admission tests is one step in that direction. State-funded and in-school testing have given more of these students the chance to take at least one of these tests, and perhaps see their college plans in a new light. States should continue to ensure all groups have access to these tests.

Are states narrowing achievement gaps? The increases in test participation rates among minority students are a strong indication of progress. More students taking the tests may mean more college applications. Yet, state leaders should follow the score results of students from these groups closely to ensure their scores keep pace with other students and to monitor their chances for success in college.

The disappointing news is that — just as overall average scores declined — the state average scores for black and Hispanic students, generally declined or remained flat. The ACT Benchmark studies indicate

Table 5

Percentage of Graduating Seniors Taking a College Admission Test While in High School By Racial and Ethnic Group, 2008 to 2013

The classes of high school graduating seniors taking college admission tests while in high school became more heterogeneous.

	Percentage of All Tested Seniors					
	White		Black		Hispanic[1]	
	2008	2013	2008	2013	2008	2013
SREB-ACT States						
Alabama	65	62	26	28	1	3
Arkansas	71	65	17	17	3	8
Florida	44	40	22	22	19	27
Georgia	50	46	33	34	3	7
Kentucky	84	76	8	9	1	4
Louisiana	60	51	28	32	2	5
Mississippi	54	50	37	40	1	2
North Carolina	61	53	22	22	3	10
Oklahoma	64	57	8	7	5	10
South Carolina	55	57	34	30	2	4
Tennessee	70	67	19	19	2	5
West Virginia	89	87	3	4	1	2
SREB-SAT States						
Delaware	67	56	19	25	2	3
Florida	51	45	14	17	18	21
Georgia	56	52	28	30	2	3
Maryland	52	47	28	31	4	5
North Carolina	64	60	22	24	2	3
South Carolina	64	63	24	26	1	2
Texas	48	39	12	14	13	18
Virginia	61	58	18	20	3	5

Note: SREB-ACT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the ACT while in high school. SREB-SAT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the SAT while in high school.

[1] ACT reports Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican student groups together as part of the larger Hispanic/Latino group. SAT reports the Mexican or Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups separately from the Hispanic or Latino group.

Sources: ACT, Inc. and the College Board

Table 6

Change in Numbers of High School Graduates in SREB States By Racial and Ethnic Group, 2008 to 2013

	2008	2013[1]	Percent Change
Black	235,570	243,457	3
Hispanic[2]	151,993	206,055	36
White	590,651	562,217	-5

[1] Projected totals

[2] ACT reports Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican student groups together as part of the larger Hispanic/Latino group. SAT reports the Mexican or Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups separately from the Hispanic or Latino group.

Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

students with low scores will likely have problems in freshman courses.

Students from minority groups gained ground in a few SREB states. Six of the 12 SREB-ACT states had an increase in the state average ACT score for either black or Hispanic students (and in some cases both) from 2008 to 2013. For the SAT, two of the eight SREB-SAT states had a score gain for one or both groups. The largest declines, not surprising, were most prominently in states that adopted "test-everyone" policies. (See Table 7 on next page.)

But the gains were not enough to narrow achievement gaps in all of these states. Even when white seniors experienced declines in average scores — as they did in five of the 12 SREB-ACT states and in six of the eight SREB-SAT states — in general, the results for black and Hispanic students fell by larger percentages.

Even in states where black or Hispanic students experienced a score gain, these gains generally did not match the gains for white students. Only one SREB-ACT state and two SREB-SAT saw achievement gaps between these groups narrow during the period. (See Appendix for a state-by-state analysis.)

Growing or flat performance gaps between racial groups in most SREB states are not surprising with the exponential growth of black and Hispanic high school participation in ACT and SAT testing since 2008. To ensure that states are meeting the *Challenge 2020* goals and bringing SREB regional averages on the ACT and SAT to national averages, policy-makers should help students get the support they need to be ready for postsecondary education. This issue is even more pressing as black and Hispanic students grow to be a larger proportion of high school seniors across the SREB region.

States at a Glance

- In West Virginia, both black and Hispanic students narrowed the gap with white students on the ACT.
- In Florida, Hispanic students narrowed the gap with white students on the SAT state average score.
- Black and Hispanic seniors in Virginia narrowed the gap with white students on the SAT composite score.

These gains are especially significant since black and Hispanic students increased their proportion in the senior classes to take these tests in all three states, as the proportion of their white peers fell over the same period.

Table 7

Results for Graduating Seniors Taking a College Admission Test While in High School By Racial and Ethnic Group, 2008 to 2013

College admission test scores fell more for black and Hispanic students than for white students in most SREB states.

		White		Black		Hispanic[1]	
	Percentage of Seniors Tested, 2013	2013 Average Score	Score Change Since 2008	2013 Average Score	Score Change Since 2008	2013 Average Score	Score Change Since 2008
SREB-ACT States							
Alabama	78	21.8	0.3	17.2	0	19.7	-0.6
Arkansas	90	21.4	-0.1	16.7	-0.3	18.9	-0.2
Florida	74	21.7	0.1	16.4	0	18.9	0.1
Georgia	51	22.8	0.5	17.5	0.1	19.9	-0.3
Kentucky	100	20.2	-1.0	16.4	-0.9	18.4	-1.5
Louisiana	100	21	-0.5	17	-0.4	19.5	-1.0
Mississippi	95	20.7	0.2	16.5	0	19.1	0.2
North Carolina	100	20.3	-2.3	15.6	-1.4	17	-3.7
Oklahoma	75	21.7	0.4	17.4	0	19	0.1
South Carolina	51	22.3	0.6	16.6	0.2	20.2	0.2
Tennessee	100	20.5	-1.1	16.3	-0.7	18.1	-1.4
West Virginia	63	20.7	0	17.5	0.2	20.5	0.4
SREB-SAT States							
Delaware	100	1448	-104	1171	-85	1222	-170
Florida	67	1547	-3	1263	-20	1428	3
Georgia	75	1543	-13	1276	-6	1446	-1
Maryland	73	1623	0	1255	-2	1382	-35
North Carolina	62	1567	-4	1260	-1	1432	-16
South Carolina	64	1522	-19	1221	-29	1426	-14
Texas	59	1568	-11	1267	-19	1298	-31
Virginia	71	1595	6	1296	11	1465	28

Note: SREB-ACT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the ACT while in high school. SREB-SAT states are states in which more than half of graduates took the SAT while in high school.

[1] ACT reports Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican student groups together as part of the larger Hispanic/Latino group. SAT reports the Mexican or Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups separately from the Hispanic/Latino group.

Sources: ACT, Inc. and the College Board

Important considerations

- **No surprise in the numbers:** It should not be a surprise to education leaders and policy-makers that the numbers of students taking the ACT and SAT rose. Among SREB states, the size of the graduating classes grew substantially as the "baby-boom echo" moved through school. In addition, high school graduation rates grew to their highest rate in three decades. Even so, the size of the numbers did surprise many analysts, because they had not factored in the role of state policy in swelling the proportion of the senior classes that would take the ACT and SAT.

- **Silver lining in the falling scores:** The old maxim that state average scores will fall if more students in a state take the ACT or SAT proved true in the 2013 score reports. Even so, the reports hold good news and challenges. Policy-makers know that when a larger proportion of the class — representing a broader cross-section of talents — takes the test, the range of scores will be broader, and the state average score will likely fall. They realize that high-achieving, well-prepared students are still scoring high. And, they also realize that state-funded programs that permit students to take the tests in their own schools are removing the financial burden some eligible students were facing and encouraging many of them to pursue a postsecondary option they might not have considered.

- **Cause for concern in the widening gaps:** Far too many SREB states saw gaps widen between black and white students and between Hispanic and white students between 2008 and 2013. During this period, SREB states experienced increasing population change, with Hispanic students growing significantly in the SREB region and black student populations growing, although more modestly. White student populations, as a proportion of their senior classes, are shrinking in most SREB states. These trends are documented for SREB states in the 2013 report, *A Decade of Progress: How SREB States Achieved Exceptional Gains.*

  If SREB states are to make progress in high school and college completion, they need far greater percentages of black and Hispanic students to complete high school ready for college. SREB's *Challenge to Lead 2020* goal is for 80 percent of students to graduate from high school ready for college. The goal carries an expectation that at least 90 percent of the class will have to graduate from high school for the state to reach the 80 percent college-readiness goal. States cannot meet the goal without helping greater numbers of black and Hispanic students aspire to college, take rigorous courses, prepare for college admission tests, and — if necessary — take transitional courses in their senior year to ensure college readiness.

- **Opportunity:** Six states now test everyone on either the ACT or SAT. Other states have expanded the number of students who take some kind of test to measure college readiness as early as the junior year. They have adopted policies that use tests to assess college readiness for school accountability. So what do states gain from this decision? If they choose the ACT or SAT, they get a national measure on the quality of their standards and curriculum, particularly in literacy and math (and for the ACT, in science). SREB-ACT states also benefit from having the ACT Benchmarks to gauge college readiness in four subject areas. Once the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia assessments are available, they will have more options.

  These SREB states also gain the opportunity to assess all juniors so they can serve the ones with college aspirations but low scores during their senior year. Schools can use college admission test results to identify any students with weaknesses and help them build skills so they can complete high school ready for college and careers.

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Appendix A

Attainment of College and Career Readiness On the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, 2013

Percentage of Graduating Seniors Meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, 2013

Too few students in SREB states demonstrate adequate preparation on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks.

	Percentage of Seniors Tested	Percentage by Subject				Percentage by Number of Benchmarks Met				
		English	Reading	Math	Science	Met 0	Met 1	Met 2	Met 3	Met 4
U.S.	54	64	44	44	36	31	16	14	13	26
SREB-ACT State Median[1]	NA	61	39	33	29	36	19	15	12	19
Alabama	78	66	41	31	30	31	21	16	12	20
Arkansas	90	63	39	35	29	33	19	16	12	20
Florida	74	54	38	35	26	40	16	13	12	19
Georgia	51	64	43	38	33	32	17	15	12	23
Kentucky	100	57	36	30	28	39	18	14	11	18
Louisiana	100	60	33	29	25	37	21	15	11	16
Mississippi	95	54	29	21	20	43	22	14	9	12
North Carolina	100	43	31	33	25	49	14	11	10	17
Oklahoma	75	66	45	37	35	29	18	17	14	23
South Carolina	51	62	41	39	32	33	17	15	13	22
Tennessee	100	58	36	29	27	39	19	14	10	18
West Virginia	63	69	45	33	34	27	21	17	15	20
SREB States With Less Than Half of Graduates Taking the ACT While in High School										
Delaware	15	77	59	59	49	19	12	15	14	40
Maryland	21	73	54	54	45	23	14	14	14	36
Texas	37	61	43	48	36	32	15	14	13	26
Virginia	26	76	57	57	47	20	13	15	15	37

Note: "NA" means not applicable.

[1] Shaded rows show the states that are not SREB-ACT states, because fewer than 50 percent of their seniors took the ACT while in high school. SREB results in this table are the median of the SREB-ACT states and do not include results from the SREB states that are shaded.

Source: ACT, Inc.

Appendix B

Achievement Gaps on the ACT and SAT by Race and Ethnicity, 2008 to 2013

B-1

Point Change in Average ACT Scores, 2008 to 2013

	U.S.	AL	AR	FL	GA	KY	LA	MS	NC	OK	SC	TN	WV
Black and White Students in SREB-ACT States													
Black	0	0	-0.3	0	0.1	-0.9	-0.4	0	-1.4	0	0.2	-0.7	0.2
White	0.1	0.3	-0.1	0.1	0.5	-1.0	-0.5	0.2	-2.3	0.4	0.6	-1.1	0
Did gaps narrow?													✓
Hispanic[1] and White Students in SREB-ACT States													
Hispanic	0.1	-0.6	-0.2	0.1	-0.3	-1.5	-1.0	0.2	-3.7	0.1	0.2	-1.4	0.4
White	0.1	0.3	-0.1	0.1	0.5	-1.0	-0.5	0.2	-2.3	0.4	0.6	-1.1	0
Did gaps narrow?													✓

Note: SREB-ACT states are states in which more than half of all graduates took the ACT while in high school.

[1] ACT reports Mexican-American/Chicano and Puerto Rican student groups together as part of the larger Hispanic/Latino group.

Source: ACT, Inc.

B-2

Point Change in Average Composite SAT Scores, 2008 to 2013

	U.S.	DE	FL	GA	MD	NC	SC	TX	VA
Black and White Students in SREB-SAT States									
Black	-2	-85	-20	-6	-2	-1	-29	-19	11
White	-7	-104	-3	-13	0	-4	-19	-11	6
Did gaps narrow?									✓
Hispanic[1] and White Students in SREB-SAT States									
Hispanic	-10	-170	3	-1	-35	-16	-14	-31	28
White	-7	-104	-3	-13	0	-4	-19	-11	6
Did gaps narrow?			✓						✓

Note: SREB-SAT states are states in which more than half of all graduates took the SAT while in high school.

[1] SAT reports the Mexican or Mexican-American and Puerto Rican groups separately from the Hispanic or Latino group.

Source: The College Board

SREB's

Challenge to Lead 2020

Goals for Education

All children **entering school** will exhibit the knowledge and the social and developmental skills needed for success in first grade.

Student achievement for all groups in the **early grades** will exceed state standards and national averages — at rates that close achievement gaps between groups.

Student achievement for all groups in the **middle grades** will exceed state standards and national averages — at rates that close achievement gaps between groups.

Eighty percent of all groups of ninth-graders will graduate from **high school** ready for college and career training. (This likely means more than 90 percent will need to graduate from high school and more than 80 percent will need to meet readiness standards for college and career training.)

Sixty percent of working-age adults will have a **postsecondary** credential: an associate or bachelor's degree, or a career certificate. Public postsecondary institutions will make it a top priority to help states meet state needs by increasing graduates, public service and research.

Increasing percentages of **adults** without high school or postsecondary credentials will pursue opportunities to earn high school alternative certificates, college degrees or career certificates.

SREB

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