

The Condition of College and Career Readiness National 2018

Recommendations for Districts, States, and Policymakers

ACT score data over the years have consistently shown that educational outcomes among US high school graduates—in the form of academic readiness for college and career—are stagnant, and this year’s results suggest they may even be trending down. Policymakers and educators must take strong, swift actions to reverse this course. The goal should be for all young people to have access to a high-quality, holistic education that will get them on target for college readiness or career readiness by the time they graduate from high school. To help meet this goal, ACT makes the following recommendations and provides resources to help get started:

Recommendation #1:

Give educators the resources they need to help improve educational outcomes.

For educators to have the desired impact on all of the students they serve, they must be given the proper resources.

Funding for schools and education must be increased, not decreased. States and districts should provide plentiful professional development opportunities so that teachers may improve their craft and increase their positive impact. And the teaching profession must be elevated, with higher salaries and greater levels of respect, to attract talented, new instructors to the occupation.

Starting Point for K-12 Leaders and Educators

Demands on our educators are high and resources are low. We offer free materials to help you achieve your goals.

- Align curriculum and help students navigate shifts from kindergarten to career (K-Career) with research you can trust.
 - Watch Video: [How to help students transition through school](#)
 - Create a plan for the future - [Beyond Academics: A Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success](#)
- Utilize assessment results to create personalized pathways for your students with a FREE Learning Resource Tool, ACT® Academy™. ACT Academy is tied to the [ACT Holistic Framework](#) and the PLDs can connect directly to your curriculum. ([Watch the video](#))
- Access Free Professional Development. ACT is offering more professional development for educators than ever before in the forms of [in-person workshops](#), live webinars, [on-demand webinars](#) and a newly released [Knowledge Hub](#) for educators using ACT assessments

Starting Point for Policymakers

[Help improve students' preparation for college and the workforce through policy improvements](#)

[Clearly define or explain what you mean by college and career readiness for your state](#)

Explore the [new flexibility in ESSA](#) which offers states numerous opportunities to develop and implement personalized learning programs in K-12 education

[Periodically review and update standards](#) to ensure that they remain relevant to the rapidly changing skill and technology needs of postsecondary education and the workforce

Incentivize training, support, and professional development opportunities for teachers and principals to hone their strategies for engaging the “whole learner.” [ESSA Title II-A provides formula support to states and school districts to fund professional development](#)



Recommendation #2:

Assess student learning and implement improvement strategies starting early in students' educational careers.


ACT research suggests that if students are not on target for college and career readiness by the time they reach middle school, it may be too late for them to become ready by the time they graduate from high school. Assessing what students have learned, and implementing strategies to help them improve their skills and get on target, must begin in elementary school. Early assessment and intervention are critical to improving educational outcomes.

Starting Point for K-12 Leaders and Educators	Starting Point for Policymakers
<p>For many schools and districts, having consistent data to track students' progress toward college and career readiness across buildings, grade levels, and years is a long, sought-after goal. Use these resources to get started:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Research to support your work with students prior to high school■ Align with State College and Career Readiness Standards■ Best practice: One district's comprehensive assessment plan using ACT solutions that has limited impact on instructional time and aligned data from grade 3 through high school■ ACT free training on developing comprehensive assessment plans	<p>Implement the student assessment component of ESSA— follow the principles of high-quality assessment systems</p>

Recommendation #3:

Provide equitable resources for underserved students.

All students should be given the opportunity to reach their potential. But many underserved students face disparities compared to other students in their access to rigorous college-preparatory curricula, high-quality educators, and support services that help create the foundation necessary for every child to succeed after high school. In particular, students whose parents did not attend college often lack the resources, information, and support from family members and peers that they need to prepare for success. These and other similar inequities must be resolved for true growth in readiness to occur across the board.

Starting Point for K-12 Leaders and Educators	Starting Point for Policymakers
<p>Decreasing barriers for students provides unique challenges and opportunities for all of us.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Research: First Generation College Students Benefit from Accelerated Learning and Financial Aid ■ Free online learning tool for educators to incorporate into curriculum for grades 3-12: ACT Academy ■ ACT's \$36 million investment in ACT fee waivers helped low-income students to take the ACT test for free, plus free access to personalized test prep ■ New Lower Price: ACT District Testing Free and Reduced Lunch Program discount decreases barriers <p>ACT District Testing FRLP Discount Pricing</p>  <p><small>Prices are for the ACT® test and the ACT test with writing. Tiers are based on student enrollment in Free and Reduced Lunch Program (0-49%, 50-74%, 75-100%).</small></p>	<p>States should take maximum advantage of ESSA language permitting them to allocate funds to local education agencies to develop, either on their own or in collaboration with community-based or other organizations, programs and activities that would provide many of these nonacademic services to students</p>

Recommendation #4:

Ensure that students' education is holistic and addresses the needs of the "whole learner."

Mastering knowledge and skills in core subject areas is obviously essential in preparing students to succeed in college and career, but social and emotional learning (SEL) skills also play a critical role in allowing young people to reach their potential. Schools should consider assessment of students' SEL skills as a developmental tool to ensure that all of each student's needs are being identified and addressed. Also, to assist in SEL skills development, schools should consider scaling up nonacademic "wraparound" services from local community providers in areas such as mental health, family engagement, mentoring, afterschool programming, and career planning.

Starting Point for K-12 Leaders and Educators

Starting Point for Policymakers

We all know academic performance is a good predictor of college and career success. Research now shows that social and emotional learning skills and resources play a role in students' success:

- [SEL, Resources are Keys to Success](#)
- [Understanding, Assessing, and Enhancing Noncognitive Skills in Primary and Secondary Education](#)
- [Bravado, Basketball, And Back-To-School For Sophomore Year](#)
- [Planning for the Future Success Starts Now](#)
- [Eight Steps to Strengthening SEL in Your School District](#)

[ESSA codifies a holistic approach to education](#) in its requirement that state accountability systems encompass more than academics, and in its support for "well-rounded" educational opportunities.

Recommendation #5:

Collect, handle, and use assessment data responsibly, with special attention to maintaining its security and quality.

Student data privacy must be protected without hampering students' ability to benefit educationally or organizations' ability to conduct responsible research. Data literacy for teachers as well as school and district leaders should be prioritized in efforts to improve instruction. States and districts should follow the principles of high-quality assessment systems found in the ACT 2018 K-12 Education Platform when implementing the student assessment components of their state and/or federal accountability systems.

Starting Point for K-12 Leaders and Educators	Starting Point for Policymakers
<p>Funding provided by the educator training component of ESSA should be directed toward improving teachers' data and assessment literacy skills</p> <p>Digging Deeper into Educational Data</p>	<p>Prioritize data literacy for teachers and school and district leaders in efforts to improve instruction</p> <p>Funding provided by the educator training component of ESSA should be directed toward improving teachers' data and assessment literacy skills</p>