

# Promoting Equity in Education

## ACT Underserved Learner Initiatives Press Kit

Everyone has the potential to learn—and a student's background or family income should not determine educational or career opportunities.

Underserved students, who represent nearly half (46 percent) of ACT-tested 2017 U.S. high school graduates, are defined as students who would be the first generation in their family to attend college, come from low-income families and/or self-identify their race/ethnicity as minority. [ACT research](#) suggests students with any of these three characteristics are less likely than others to have access to high-quality educational and career planning opportunities and resources.

When it comes to college and career readiness, underserved students lag far behind their peers. Only 9 percent of ACT-tested graduates who have all three underserved characteristics showed strong readiness for college coursework by meeting three or four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, meaning they are likely to struggle in college-level coursework.

ACT is dedicated to ensuring underserved students have access to quality coursework and information to assist them in planning for the future and launched the ACT Center for Equity in Learning to help do that.

We are **committed to closing the gap** through our initiatives, research, and partnerships. This press kit summarizes highlights of our efforts to assist learners and promote equity in education.

## ACT Initiatives

### Get Access, Get Ready, and Get Noticed

#### Fee Waivers

**ACT provided fee waivers to more than [650,000 students](#)** who have demonstrated financial need so that they could take the ACT test for free. Those waivers, **a value of \$36 million**, are just the start to help level the playing field for all students.

## Free Access to ACT® Online Prep™ & Online Prep Live

Students who use fee waivers to register for the ACT test automatically **receive free access to a convenient online test preparation resource – ACT Online Prep**. Operational on any device, the prep aids students for the test by evaluating their academic strengths and areas for development.

In addition, the students automatically receive **free access to ACT Kaplan Online Prep Live**, which provides live content-based instruction from expert teachers.

## Free Additional Score Reports

**Starting in September 2018**, students from low-income families who take the ACT with fee waivers will be allowed to **send ACT score reports for free** to colleges and/or scholarship agencies at any time during their college search process.

## In-School Testing - Bringing the ACT to Students

ACT is a pioneer for in-school testing, which is a great equalizer of opportunity, bringing more underserved students into the enrollment pipeline. Our state and district testing program raises awareness and exposure among all students, not only self-selected, college-bound students.

## Accessibility

All students, regardless of their circumstances, should have the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired and increase access to high quality education. **Our accessibility efforts are designed to decrease barriers to learning and engagement by ensuring accessibility for all students.**

ACT is committed to making all products, assessment programs, and services accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable laws. Through policies that lead our field in balancing fairness, transparency, and impact, we are creating a model for assessment delivery, reporting, preparation, and diagnostics that gives all learners the opportunity to confidently and accurately demonstrate their competence and proficiency.

## English Learner Supports

The [number of English learners](#) is growing in our country and ACT is committed to improving access and opportunity for them and all underserved learners. **We provide supports on the ACT test to U.S. students who are English learners.** They are designed to improve access and equity for students whose proficiency in English might prevent them from fully demonstrating the skills and knowledge they have learned in school.

The goal is to help ensure the ACT scores earned by English learners accurately reflect what they have learned in school. Most importantly for these students, the test results will be college reportable.

The supports for qualified English learners include the following:

- Additional time on the test (not to exceed time-and-a-half)
- Use of an approved word-to-word bilingual glossary (containing no word definitions)
- Test instructions provided in the student's native language (including Spanish and a limited number of other languages initially)
- Testing in a non-distracting environment (i.e., in a separate room)

## Educational Opportunity Service

The ACT Educational Opportunity Service (EOS) is a **free service** allowing underserved students **learn about educational, scholarship, career, and financial aid opportunities** from colleges, universities, financial aid and scholarship agencies, and other organizations offering educational programs.

## ACT® Academy™

ACT Academy is a **free resource** to help students improve their college and career readiness by **providing video lessons, interactive practice questions, full-length practice tests, educational games and other materials targeted to their academic needs.** Each student will receive their own personalized study plan based on their scores from the ACT® test, PreACT®, or official ACT practice tests.

**ACT Academy, <https://academy.act.org/>, is compatible with all devices.** Parents, teachers, and counselors can also use ACT Academy to help students study and learn.

## OpenEd

OpenEd provides students, teachers, and parents with **free online resources** for all subjects and grades, including personalized ACT and PreACT prep. Videos, games, and interactives are gathered from all of the best publishers available online, then vetted for quality and aligned to learning goals to help students find exactly the topics in which they need help. Due to the variety of publishers on OpenEd, students can find resources on the same topic presented in different ways to accommodate their different learning styles.

**OpenEd offers free assessments with authentic ACT questions to help students understand their knowledge gaps.** For each question a student answers incorrectly, OpenEd automatically returns the perfect hand-picked video they need to watch in order to master that topic. If an assessment determines a student needs even more help with a certain topic, OpenEd suggests assessments on previous standards to help them build up their knowledge.

## ACT Partnerships & Research

We continue to pursue initiatives and research with a number of public and private organizations to improve educational success.

## Steps2College

This interactive tool allows visitors, including students and their families as well as school counselors, to learn about the various milestones during a student's final year of high school.

This free resource, [www.steps2college.org](http://www.steps2college.org), explores what support is available to assist students with the college application process, what student aid options are available, helps celebrate college decision-making, and helps ensure that students know the critical enrollment and transition steps once they have decided where to go. The resource section allows visitors to filter the items of most interest based on where in the college-going process they are.

The partnership is composed of [ACT Center for Equity in Learning](#), [American College Application Campaign from the American Council on Education \(ACE\)](#), [American University School of Education's Center for Postsecondary Readiness and Success](#), [Better Make Room](#), and the [National College Access Network \(NCAN\)](#).

## NCCEP/GEAR UP Partnerships with ACT

NCCEP and GEAR UP have collaborated with ACT on many initiatives. Over the past five years, NCCEP and ACT have been co-leading a seven-year evaluation study of a consortium of GEAR UP state partnership grants. In addition, ACT has worked with NCCEP to inform its Career and College Club peer-to-peer curriculum through the ACT® Holistic Framework™, and will research the effectiveness of the curriculum towards supporting student's matriculation into postsecondary education by successfully obtaining academic and non-academic skills.

ACT serves on the NCCEP Board of Directors Executive Committee and many [GEAR UP grants](#) take advantage of ACT fee waivers. ACT team members are active in many aspects of GEAR UP and NCCEP strategic initiatives.

## National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)

The National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) has **focused on increasing the college and career readiness of low-income students** through establishment and development of comprehensive local, state, and regional partnerships that bring together K12, postsecondary, community-based, and business sectors. Visit [www.edpartnerships.org](http://www.edpartnerships.org) to learn more about NCCEP.

## Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)

### Career & College Clubs

Career & College Clubs is a college and career preparation program for grades 7 through 12. Informed by the ACT Holistic Framework™, the curriculum centers around **peer-to-peer learning**, a model requiring students in the Club to teach material to each other and then educate their peers outside the Club.

This provides students the **knowledge, tools, support and confidence** they need to assume responsibility and plan for their futures.

The program seeks to increase student enrollment and completion of postsecondary education, with a particular focus on underserved learners.

Historically, per NCCEP, **76% of the students at Career & College Clubs school sites, on average, are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals.** In the 2015-16 academic year, the program had been adopted by more than 300 schools, reaching 50,000+ students.

**ACT's recent analysis found college enrollment is 85% higher for Career & College Clubs students than for a comparison group.**

## Annual Condition of College and Career Readiness Report

This [report](#) looks at the progress of the 2017 ACT-tested graduating class relative to college and career readiness. As a research-based nonprofit organization, ACT is committed to providing more meaningful data for individuals and institutions to make better decisions.

The focus is on providing better and more relevant data to students, parents, schools, districts, and states so all can make more informed decisions to improve outcomes in education and the workforce.

### Highlights from this Year's Report

- More than **2 million** US high school graduates took the **ACT test**. That's 60% of the entire US graduating class.
- The **national average ACT** composite score for the 2017 graduating class rose to **21.0** on a 1 to 36 scale.
- Among 2017 graduates, **39 percent met the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks** in at least three of the four core subject areas tested (English, math, reading, and science).
- **Underserved students** (defined as students who are minority, low-income and/or first-generation college students), **represent 46%** of the 2017 ACT graduating class.
- When it comes to college and career readiness, **underserved students lag far behind their peers.** [ACT research](#) suggests students who meet any of these underserved criteria are **less likely** than others to **have access** to high-quality educational and career planning opportunities and resources.
- **Only 9 percent of ACT-tested graduates** who have all three underserved characteristics **showed strong readiness for college coursework** by meeting three or four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, meaning they are likely to struggle in college-level coursework.

To read the full Condition of College and Career Readiness 2017 report, visit [www.act.org/content/act/en/research/condition-of-college-and-career-readiness-2017.html](http://www.act.org/content/act/en/research/condition-of-college-and-career-readiness-2017.html)

## ACT Center for Equity in Learning

**ACT is dedicated to examining and addressing barriers to opportunity related to family income, race and ethnicity, and accessibility.** Closing gaps in equity while expanding opportunity and achievement for underserved populations and working learners is the focus in the ACT Center for Equity in Learning. The Center's work focuses on four pillars: research, partnerships, accessibility, and social impact

- **Research:** conducting research is critical to illuminating challenges and opportunities while leading to actions that improve learning, access, and student success
- **Partnerships:** Building partnerships and networks to foster collaboration to increase impact, including working with policymakers and other leaders on critical topics to increase awareness and understanding of issues impacting underserved individuals, families and communities
- **Accessibility:** Improving accessibility of ACT programs, services, and resources
- **Social Impact:** Educating students and their families on ways to improve postsecondary readiness and success

Read more about the ACT Center for Equity in Learning and its various initiatives at [equityinlearning.act.org](https://equityinlearning.act.org).

## Help Advance Our Mission

- At ACT, we're passionate about what we do and determined to help people achieve education and workplace success.
- Our ACT State Organizations members are a unique network of education and workplace professionals who identify initiatives and align them with the mission, goals and objectives of ACT. We welcome new members.
- We're always looking for ways to connect with our advocates. Connect with us on social media:

