



## The Future Workforce of Illinois

Illinois's labor force and economy are strengthened when the state's high school graduates are prepared for college and are interested in pursuing available jobs in Illinois. Academic preparation is critical, given that many of the projected high growth job openings in Illinois will require a 2-year college degree or more. In Illinois, five of the expected highest growth career fields will be education, management, computer specialties, marketing & sales, and community services. Do Illinois's future workers have the necessary skills to fill positions in these high-growth careers? Are Illinois's future workers interested in jobs in these fields?

Using 2008 ACT results for 87,718 Illinois high school graduates with career interest information, and 2004-2014 Illinois state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

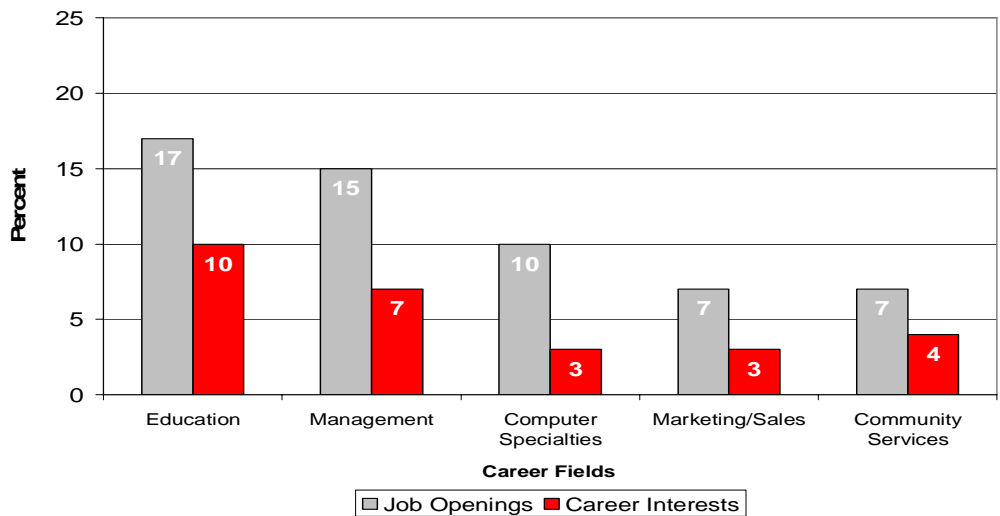
- There is some interest among Illinois high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Illinois students expressing interest in most of these high-growth career fields, nearly two-thirds are ready for first-year college English courses, while approximately one-half are prepared for college-level social science courses.
- Of Illinois students expressing interest in most of these high-growth career fields, less than one-half are ready for college-level math or science courses.

**Illinois educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Illinois career fields.**

### Students' Interests

- Gaps between expected jobs and interested students are apparent for careers in education (secondary teachers, administrators, etc.), management (convention planners, hotel/restaurant managers, etc.), computer specialties (computer programmers, database administrators, etc.), and marketing & sales (insurance agents, buyers, etc.), with more jobs expected than students interested in jobs in these fields (Figure 1). Illinois may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

**Figure 1: Projected Annual Job Openings and Illinois High School Students' Interests in High Growth Illinois Career Fields<sup>1,2</sup>**

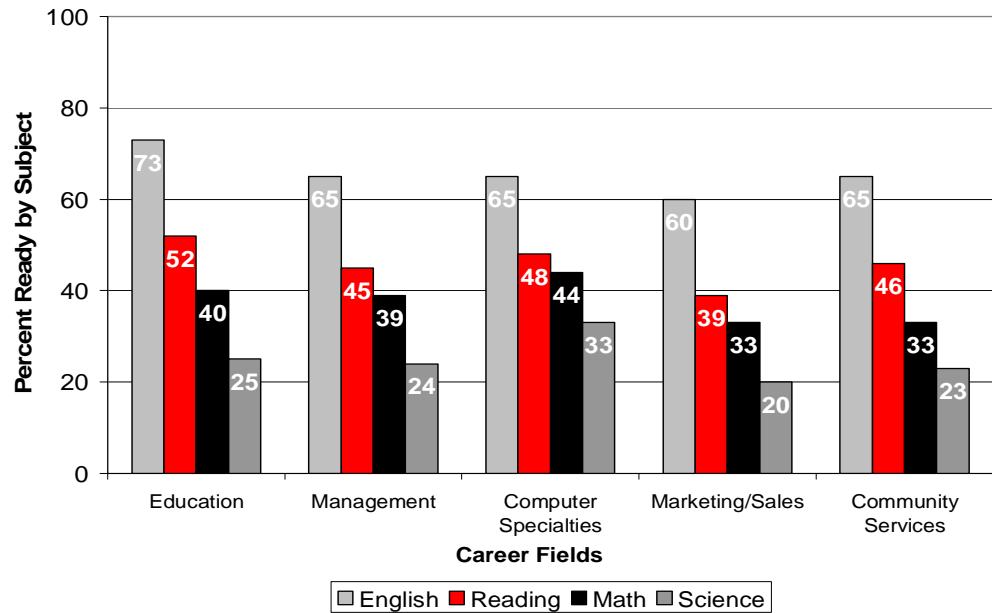


<sup>1</sup>State projections 2004-2014 provided by Illinois Department of Employment Security.

<sup>2</sup>Based on 2008 ACT-tested Illinois students ( $n = 87,718$ ) with valid career information.

- Although the gap between students interested in the community services field (social workers, school counselors, etc.), and the jobs that will be available in this field is more narrow, many of these students are not ready to meet or exceed one or more of ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, mathematics, or science, as shown in Figure 2. Students who are interested and college ready are more likely to be successful in the coursework needed to enter this high-growth career field.

**Figure 2: ACT College Readiness Benchmark Performance of Illinois High School Students Interested in High Growth Illinois Career Fields by Subject<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup>Based on 2008 ACT-tested Illinois students ( $n = 87,718$ ) with valid subject scores and career information.

**Illinois educators should continue to encourage their students to achieve the highest level of preparation for college, in order to meet Illinois Workforce demands.**

#### *Students' Skills*

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Illinois, nearly two-thirds or more of students are prepared for first-year college coursework in English for the five high-growth career fields. Fewer students interested in these high-growth fields are prepared to succeed in college-level social science courses (indicated by ACT Reading Benchmark), with students pursuing marketing & sales careers being the least prepared and students pursuing education careers being the most prepared.
- Less than one-half of students wanting to enter computer specialties are ready for college-level math or science courses. One-quarter or less of students pursuing careers in education, management, marketing & sales, and community services are ready for college-level science.
- Overall, the pattern of readiness for college coursework is similar across the five high-growth career fields: Student preparation is highest for English and social sciences, and lower for math and science. The lower levels of preparation among graduating high school students is alarming, given the high demand for science- and math-intensive careers such as computer programming and teaching.