



# The Future Workforce of Kentucky

Kentucky'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 Kentucky. Academic preparation is critical, given that many of the projected high growth job openings in Kentucky will require a 2-year college degree or more. In Kentucky, five of the expected highest growth career fields will be education, management, health care, marketing & sales, and community services. Do Kentucky's future workers have the necessary skills to fill positions in these high-growth careers? Are Kentucky's future workers interested in jobs in these fields?

Using 2008 ACT results for 21,819 Kentucky high school graduates with career interest information, and 2004-2014 Kentucky state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

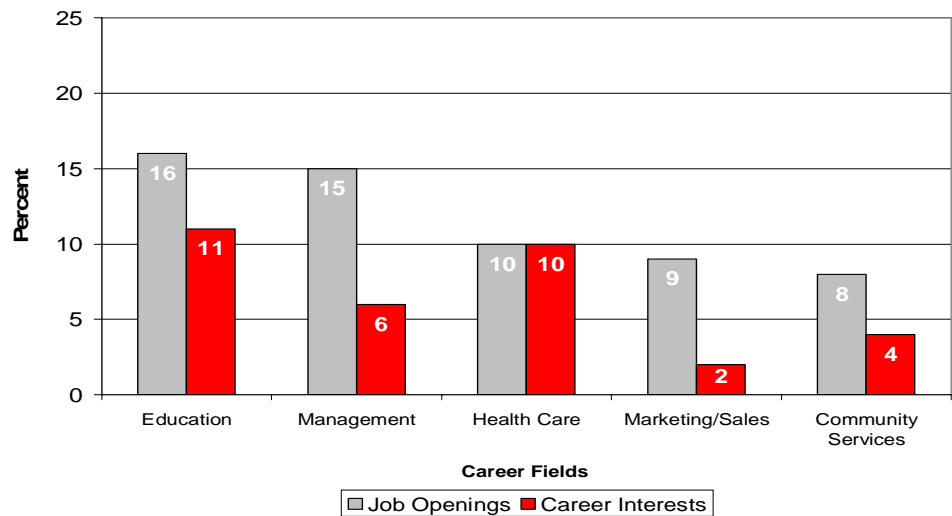
- There is some interest among Kentucky high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Kentucky students expressing interest in many of these high-growth career fields, approximately two-thirds are ready for first-year college English courses,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

**Kentucky educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Kentucky 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.), marketing & sales (insurance agents, buyers, etc.), and community services (social workers, school counselors, etc.), with more jobs expected than students interested in jobs in these fields (Figure 1). Kentucky may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

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

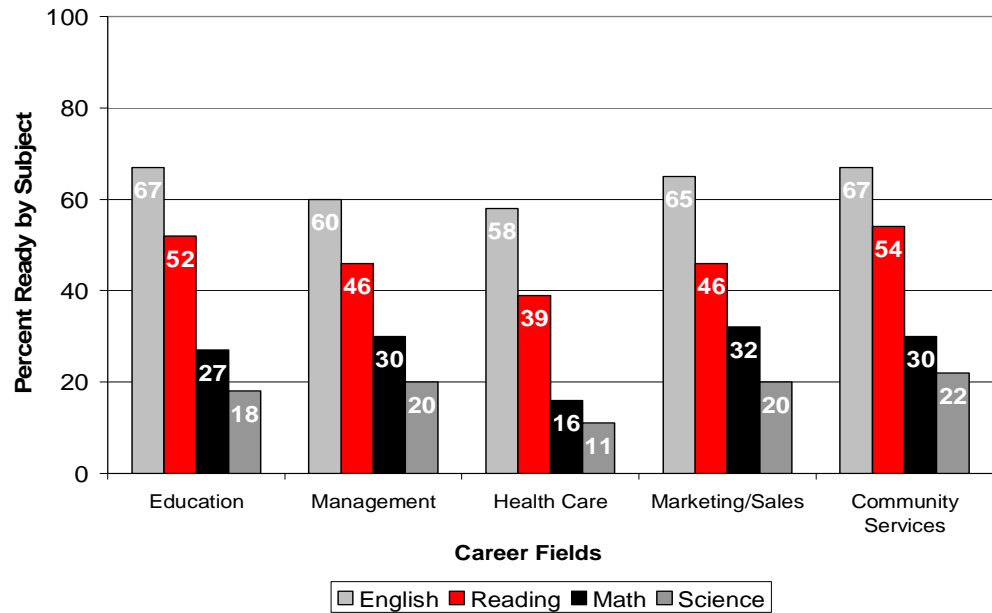


<sup>1</sup>State projections 2004-2014 provided by Workforce Kentucky.

<sup>2</sup>Based on 2008 ACT-tested Kentucky students (n = 21,819) with valid career information.

- It appears that there is no gap between students interested in the health care field (nurses, occupational therapists, etc.), and the jobs that will be available in this field, but 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 Kentucky High School Students Interested in High Growth Kentucky Career Fields by Subject<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup>Based on 2008 ACT-tested Kentucky students ( $n = 21,819$ ) with valid subject scores and career information.

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

#### *Students' Skills*

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Kentucky, approximately two-thirds of students are prepared for first-year college coursework in English for three of 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 health care careers being the least prepared and students pursuing community services careers being the most prepared.
- Approximately one-third of students wanting to enter management, marketing & sales, and community services are ready for college-level math courses. Less than one-quarter of students pursuing the five high-growth careers 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 much 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 nursing, pharmacy, and teaching.