

The Importance of Behavioral Skills and Navigation Factors for Education and Work Success

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Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been greater recognition by educators, employers, and policymakers of the importance of behavioral skills and navigation factors for education and career success. A growing body of research shows that these factors contribute to diverse positive outcomes in both education and workforce settings. In addition, recent legislation (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) provides states with the flexibility to include a non-academic indicator (in conjunction with traditional academic achievement indicators) when measuring K–12 student progress and success, calling attention to the role of non-academic factors in contributing to educational outcomes. These factors are also important to employers. Surveys of employers indicate an increased need for employees with a range of behavioral and navigation skills that influence work outcomes.

Recognizing the significance of behavioral skills and navigation factors, ACT recently advanced the ACT Holistic Framework, a more holistic approach to preparing people for success throughout their education and work journeys. This comprehensive, research-based framework includes core academic skills, cross-cutting capabilities, behavioral skills, and navigation factors across critical transitions that are considered essential for achieving education and career success.

ACT National Curriculum Survey[®] and Sample

Every few years, thousands of K–12 teachers and postsecondary instructors complete the ACT National Curriculum Survey, identifying the knowledge and skills being taught and considered essential for college and career readiness in the subjects of English/writing, mathematics, reading, and science. In 2016, ACT expanded the survey by including questions about the importance of behavioral and navigation knowledge and skills for preparing individuals to be successful in education and work. For the first time, this survey was also completed by workforce professionals.

Educators (at the elementary school, middle school, high school, and college levels) who teach courses in English/writing, mathematics, reading (e.g., language arts and social studies), and science (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics, and earth/space science) in public and private U.S. institutions participated in the survey. Workforce supervisors and employees (excluded from this report) from many different businesses also completed the survey. Table 1 shows numbers of survey respondents in each area.

Table 1. 2016 ACT National Curriculum Survey Respondents

Area	Number of Respondents
Elementary School	2,298
Middle School	1,331
High School	2,717
College	2,252
Workforce Supervisors	371

Holistic Framework Domains



Core Academic Skills—knowledge and skills necessary to perform essential tasks in core academic content.



Cross-Cutting Capabilities—general knowledge and skills necessary to perform essential tasks across academic content areas.



Behavioral Skills—interpersonal, self-regulatory, and task-related behaviors important for adaptation to and successful performance in education and workplace settings.



Education & Career Navigation Factors—focuses on what individuals know about themselves and their environments, and how they use this information to make choices, plan actions, and move along their education and career paths.

Behavioral Skills



Acting Honestly—

Describes the extent to which a person values and adheres to ethical and moral standards of behavior, as well as a personal level of humility.



Getting Along with

Others—Describes the extent to which a person interacts positively and cooperates with others, and is generally kind, friendly, and tactful.



Keeping an Open

Mind—Describes a person's level of open-mindedness and curiosity about a variety of ideas, beliefs, people, and experiences.



Maintaining

Composure—Describes the extent to which a person is relatively calm, serene, and able to manage emotions effectively.



Socializing with

Others—Describes a person's preferred level of social interaction, behavior in interpersonal situations, and optimism.



Sustaining Effort—

Describes a person's level of diligence, effort, organization, self-control, and compliance.

For behavioral skills, respondents rated how important the broader set of behavioral skills (see sidebar) are for success. For education and career navigation, respondents rated the importance of these factors for success, including self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, making connections between education and work, identifying education/career goals, how to progress along education and career paths, academic/career planning, and being open to different learning opportunities. A number of navigation questions varied for the three respondent groups (Grades 3–12 educators, college instructors, and workforce supervisors) to account for age and context differences. While the underlying concepts remained the same, some differences in results across respondent groups may be due in part to question variability. All respondents provided ratings using a five-point scale where (0) was 'not important' and (4) was 'high importance.' Combined importance ratings within the top half of the scale (ratings of 3 and 4) are reported in Figures 1 and 2.

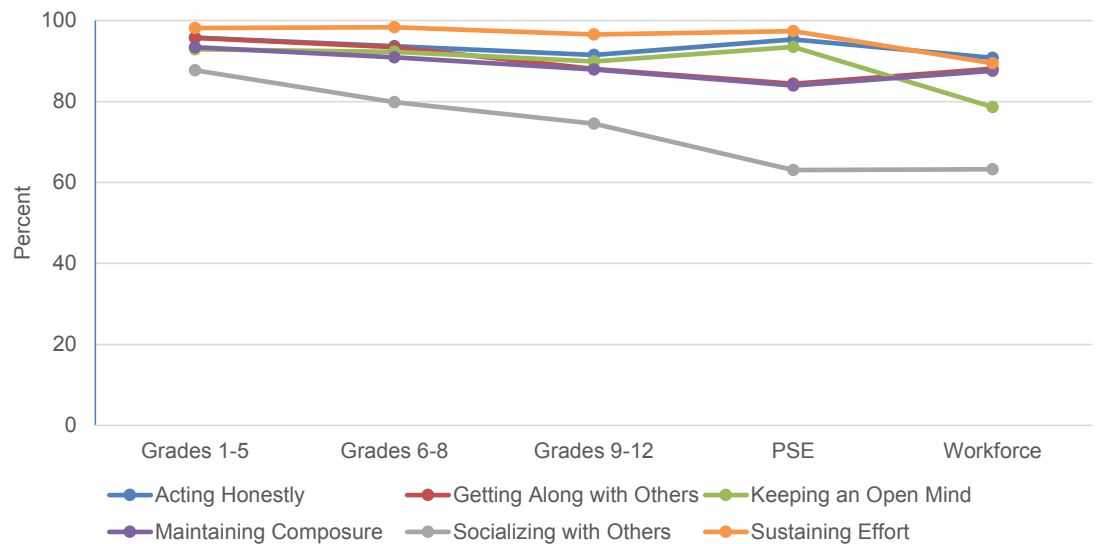


Figure 1. Behavioral skills importance ratings (based on ratings of 3 and 4) at the elementary school, middle school, high school, postsecondary, and workforce levels.

Behavior Findings

- At every stage of development, 5 of 6 behavioral skills domains are considered to be highly important for education and work success
- Sustained Effort is seen most consistently as important for every developmental level (mean = 96%)
- Socializing with Others was seen as less important, with K-12 teachers rating it higher (mean = 81%) than PS instructors and workforce professionals (mean = 63%)

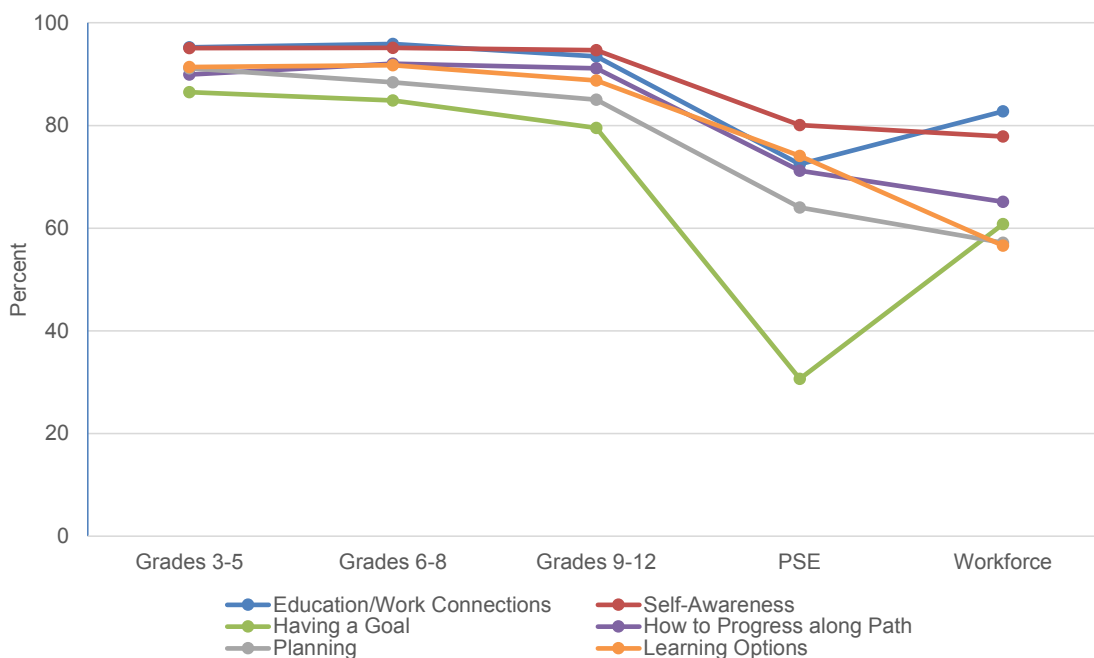


Figure 2. Education and career navigation importance ratings (based on ratings of 3 and 4) at the elementary school, middle school, high school, postsecondary, and workforce levels.

Navigation Findings

- A majority of educators in grades 3-12 rate navigation factors as important for success (mean = 91%), while fewer postsecondary (65%) and workforce (67%) respondents do
- Teachers consider Having a Goal important to be ready for success (mean = 84%) than postsecondary instructors (31%) and workforce supervisors (61%)
- Navigation factors related to understanding the self and the environment are rated highly important by teachers in grades 3-12:
 - Education/Work Connections (mean = 95%)
 - Self-Awareness (mean = 95%)

The above results show that behavioral and navigation factors are considered essential for education and career success. For elementary, middle, and high school educators, the development and effective use of these factors are central to student achievement and progress in school as well as a healthy school climate. For postsecondary educators and workforce supervisors, there are also clear performance and persistence benefits during college and at work that result from applying behavioral skills and navigation factors. With educators, supervisors, and researchers emphasizing the significance of these factors, there is an even greater call to action for educators, employers, and policymakers to focus on behavioral skills and education and career navigation—a number of recommendations follow.

Education and Career Navigation



Self-Knowledge—

Describes the awareness and perceptions of one’s own abilities, interests, skills, values, attitudes, and beliefs that contribute to understanding the self.



Environmental

Factors—Describes the information, conditions, connections, and experiences related to education and work that are acquired primarily from external sources and surroundings.



Integration—

Describes the ongoing process of combining self-knowledge and environmental factors to form personally relevant knowledge structures used to make decisions, evaluate information and goals, and plan courses of education or work actions.



Managing Career and Education Actions—

Describes the ongoing process of implementing plans, and enacting purposeful behaviors that facilitate education and occupation progress.

Recommendations

Educators

- Identify opportunities to incorporate the development of knowledge and skills in the behavioral skills and navigation domains into daily lessons and classroom routines
- Employ behavioral skills and navigation factors in formative assessment solutions to further personalize learning and to monitor student progress in the development of these critical skills
- Encourage students to seek out services (e.g., advising, tutoring, academic and career counseling) that are designed to help students with developing critical behavioral and navigation knowledge and skills
- Participate in professional development opportunities that provide the information and tools needed to facilitate the development of behavioral and navigation knowledge and skills in classrooms and after-school programs

Employers

- Incorporate measures of behavioral skills and navigation factors into organizational training, professional development programs, and performance systems (e.g., 360 ratings, quarterly or mid-year reviews)
- Provide opportunities for employees to develop and refine their behavior and navigation skills through mentoring, professional development programs (e.g., cross-training), workshops, online courses, self-guided activities, etc.
- If using behavioral skills and navigation factors for selection purposes, ensure that those factors are relevant to the job and that the measures have been validated for that job/context

Policymakers

- Provide fiscal support for the resources needed to develop behavioral and navigation knowledge and skills throughout the K-Career continuum
- Ensure greater coordination across K–12, postsecondary, and workforce related to the alignment of objectives, programs, and measurable outcomes
- Support legislation that provides for more holistic accountability models and incorporates behavioral skills and education and career navigation factors

For further reading, see:

- Full report, [The Importance of Behavioral Skills and Navigation Factors for Education and Work Success](#)
- [The ACT Holistic Framework](#)