

# Initial Efficacy Evidence for the ACT Certified Educator Program

Justine Radunzel, PhD, Krista Mattern, PhD, and Jeff Schiel, PhD

Educators are continuously looking for ways to enhance their teaching strategies and skills. At the same time, students and parents need access to qualified instructors in many different subject areas. The ACT® Certified Educator™ program is designed to satisfy each of these needs and, ultimately, to help students learn and succeed. Formally launched in September 2018, the ACT Certified Educator program is a training program designed for educators seeking certification to show they have the content knowledge and teaching skills necessary to improve students' academic achievement and readiness for success after high school.

Certification in the program can be earned in any or all of the four ACT subject areas (English, math, reading, and science) plus writing. In addition, the ACT Certified Educator Basics course covers understanding of the fundamental aspects of the ACT test and promotes the development and use of learner-centered skills. Program applicants are required to complete the ACT Certified Educator Basics course as it covers a range of topics applicable to all subject areas: principal ACT knowledge, resource utilization, learner-centered skills, and standards of professionalism. At the time of the current study, the Basics course also covered topics related to: cognitive learning strategies and supportive skills. Table 1 provides example content related to each topic. The other training courses primarily cover topics such as providing

individualized tutoring, identifying and recommending strategies, and understanding test structure and content in a specific subject area (e.g., see Table 1 for topics covered in the ACT Certified Educator English course).

Learning objectives have been identified for the various topics covered in the courses and are made available to participants in the course materials. To become an ACT Certified Educator, individuals must achieve a specific score on the ACT subject test to demonstrate content area expertise, take the training course, and pass an end-of-course exam.

The current study focused on understanding participants' reactions to the program. This information was collected via a survey and represents one source of evidence to evaluate the efficacy of the program for enhancing educators' teaching and tutoring strategies and skills. Survey items focused on obtaining information and feedback from participants related to the four learner outcomes of Kirkpatrick's (1976) evaluation model that are outlined in ACT's Efficacy Framework (Mattern, 2019). The four areas include (1) participants' *reaction* and perceived value of the program, (2) whether the intended *learning* took place as part of the program, (3) whether any new *behaviors* resulted from attending the program and becoming certified, and (4) evidence of *results* leading to intended outcomes.



[ACT.org/research](https://www.act.org/research)

**Table 1.** Examples of Topics Covered in the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English Courses

Program	Topics	Examples
Basics	Principal ACT knowledge	ACT core values ACT test registration
	Resource utilization	ACT test prep ACT test day procedures ACT scores
	Learner-centered skills	Individualized tutoring and strategic studying Social and emotional learning Strategies for success on test day
	Professionalism	Respectful communication with students Appropriate communication with students
	Cognitive learning strategies*	Support recall and understanding of information Increased memory Strengthen connections Acquisition and retention Comprehension
	Supportive skills*	Increase awareness Honest self-recognition Ask questions Take responsibility
English	Providing individualized tutoring	Identifying students' strengths and weaknesses with regard to English content Understanding students' strategies, approaches, and techniques when solving English problems Recommending targeted resources to improve deficiencies
	Identifying and recommending strategies	Test-taking tips such as pacing Differentiating between easier and harder questions
	Understanding test structure and content	Content/topic areas covered on English test Skill target of a given ACT English item Appropriate language usage

\*Included as a main topic in the Basics course only during the pilot phase of the program, including at the time of the current study.

For the first learner outcome—**reaction**—we examined the degree to which participants found the program relevant, engaging, and valuable to their role as an educator, as well as whether they would take other ACT Certified Educator courses or recommend the program. For the second learner outcome—**learning**—we summarized the certification exam pass rates, which provided a measure of whether the

individuals met the learning objectives for the training. We also examined participants' perceptions of the value of specific topics covered in the course. For the third learner outcome—**behaviors**—we explored the degree to which the participants indicated that the program as well as the specific topics covered influenced their teaching and tutoring strategies since earning the certification. For the fourth

learner outcome—**results**—we summarize whether participants reported experiencing any initial positive benefits after earning their certification, such as whether becoming certified has enhanced their professional credibility and recognition from students and parents or whether their students appeared to be better prepared to take the ACT test.

## Data and Methods

As part of the formal launch of the program, ACT Certified Educator Basics and English courses were offered at domestic and international sites in November 2018. At that time, applicants were recommended, but not required, to take the Basics course. Approximately four months after the courses occurred, participants were invited to complete an online survey to gather their feedback pertaining to the specific training program(s) they took and how the program has influenced their teaching strategies and skills. Reminder emails were sent to non-respondents to help improve response rates.

A total of 49 of the 81 program participants responded to the survey (60.5%); the response rate was higher for domestic participants (85.2%) than for international participants (48.1%). Respondents were slightly more likely than non-respondents to have participated in both the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English courses or only the ACT Certified Educator Basics course (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Respondents were also slightly more likely to pass the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English certification exams and to meet the ACT English score requirement (Table A1).<sup>1</sup>

Among survey respondents, participation in the specific programs was distributed as follows: 87.8% participated in the ACT Certified Educator Basics program, 77.6% in the ACT Certified Educator English program, and 65.3% in both programs. Among those that responded, the typical number of years of teaching experience and helping students prepare for the ACT was 12 and 3 years, respectively.<sup>2</sup> More details about

characteristics of survey respondents are provided in Table A2 in the Appendix.

This study is descriptive in nature, and results are presented as percentages. Percentages for each survey item are based on individuals who responded to the specific item. Due to the small number of responses received from participants who had not passed the course (6 or fewer for Basics and 9 or fewer for English; Table A1), survey response percentages are not reported separately for those who did and did not earn the certification. Future studies will explore such comparisons to examine whether program satisfaction depends on whether or not certification was earned.

Results from pilot ACT Certified Educator sessions that occurred in May and June of 2018 prior to the formal launch of the program are also highlighted to further support some findings from the current study. Participants from the pilot sessions were administered a survey in June 2018 (shortly after the training sessions ended), which included some of the questions used in the current survey. The overall response rate for the pilot survey (71.4%) was slightly higher than that of the current survey. In contrast to the current survey, the pilot survey response rate of domestic participants was lower than that of international participants (47.1% domestic, 79.2% international). It is possible that the survey administration methods contributed to this finding. For example, the pilot survey was distributed to international participants via emails sent from an ACT international partner that was highly recognizable to the participants, which might have heightened their interest in responding. By comparison, the current survey was distributed to international participants primarily through a less-personalized, automated email method.

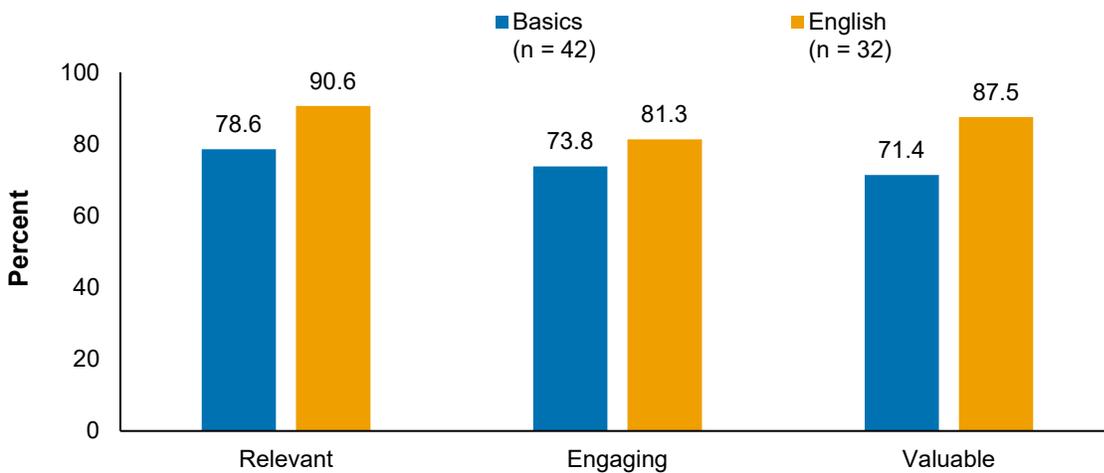
## Results

**Reaction to the Program.** Participants were asked about the degree to which they found the program *relevant* and *valuable* for their role as an educator and the degree to which the

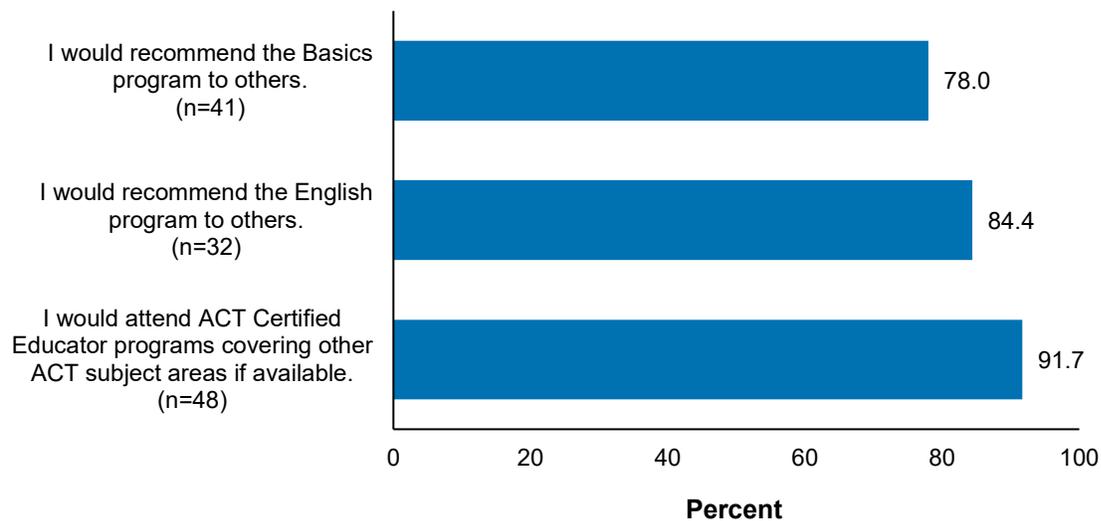
material covered was *engaging*. Respondents tended to evaluate both programs positively with regard to these descriptors. As shown in Figure 1, more than 70% of the respondents from the ACT Certified Educator Basics training found the program “very” or “moderately” relevant (78.6%), engaging (73.8%), and valuable (71.4%). Corresponding percentages for the ACT Certified Educator English program were slightly higher—ranging from 81.3% on being engaging to 90.6% on being relevant. Likewise, when participants from the May/June pilot sessions were asked about how valuable the certification would be to them, nearly 90% indicated “very” or “moderately” valuable for both programs (87.5% for ACT Certified Educator Basics and 88.1% for ACT Certified Educator English).

Another way to evaluate participants’ reactions to the program is to find out if they would recommend the program to others or attend other ACT Certified Educator courses. As shown in Figure 2, a majority of the current study respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the program that they had taken to others (78.0% for Basics and 84.4% for English). A similar result was observed among respondents from the May/June pilot sessions (82.6% for Basics and 82.9% for English). Additionally, greater than 90% of the current study respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would attend ACT Certified Educator courses covering other ACT subject areas (Figure 2).

**Figure 1.** Percentage who Responded “Very” or “Moderately” Relevant, Engaging, or Valuable when Describing the ACT Certified Educator Program<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2.** Percentage who Agreed or Strongly Agreed that They Would Recommend the Program to Others or Would Attend Other ACT Certified Educator Courses<sup>4</sup>

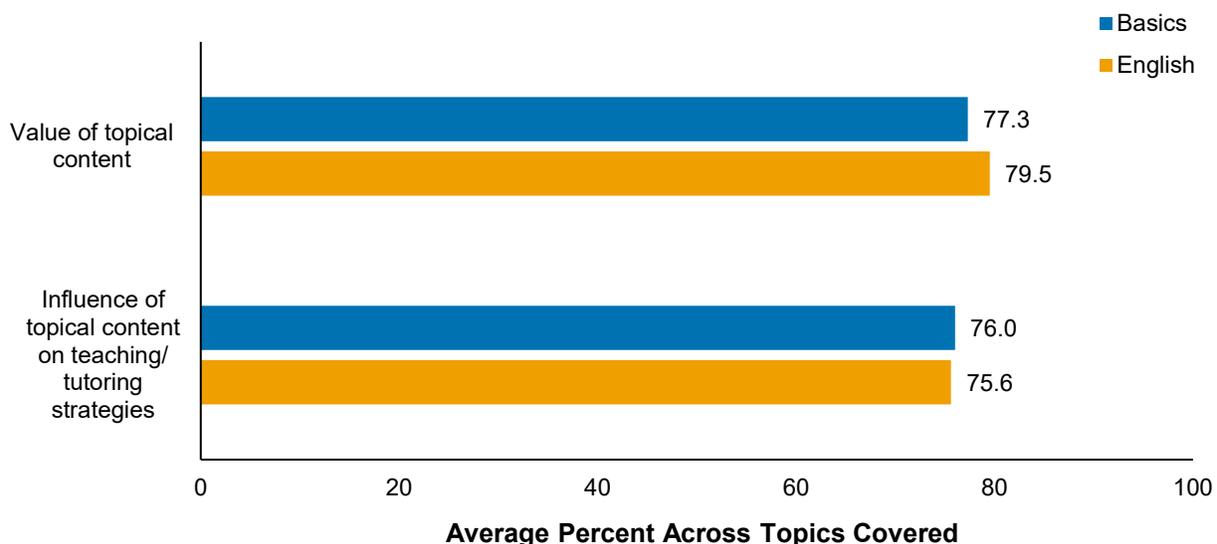


**Learning and Behaviors.** Certification exams are administered at the end of each training course. Of the respondents who took the corresponding training, 86.0% passed the Basics exam and 81.6% passed the English exam. Participants who took the ACT Certified Educator English program were also required to take the ACT English test; 81.6% achieved the ACT English score threshold, and 76.3% met both English certification requirements and became ACT® English Certified™. The pass rates were slightly higher among survey respondents than among all program participants (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Moreover, a majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the information from the course has enhanced their teaching strategies and skills (75.0% for the Basics program and 84.4% for the English program).<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, for each general topic covered in the course (six for ACT Certified Educator Basics and three for ACT Certified Educator

English; see Table 1), participants who met the program certification requirements were asked to rate the value of the information received and the level of influence the specific information has had on their teaching and tutoring strategies. The possible response options to these survey items included: a great deal, a moderate amount, a little, or none. As shown in Figure 3, the average percentage of respondents indicating they received “a great deal” or “a moderate amount” of value across the topics covered was 77.3% for the Basics course and 79.5% for the English course.<sup>6</sup> For Basics, the individual percentages per topic ranged from 69.7% for learning-centered skills to 88.2% for resource utilization. For the English program, the individual percentages per topic ranged from 76.9% for identifying and recommending strategies to 80.8% for the other two general topics. For both courses and for each general topic covered, fewer than 10% indicated that they received “no value” from the information.

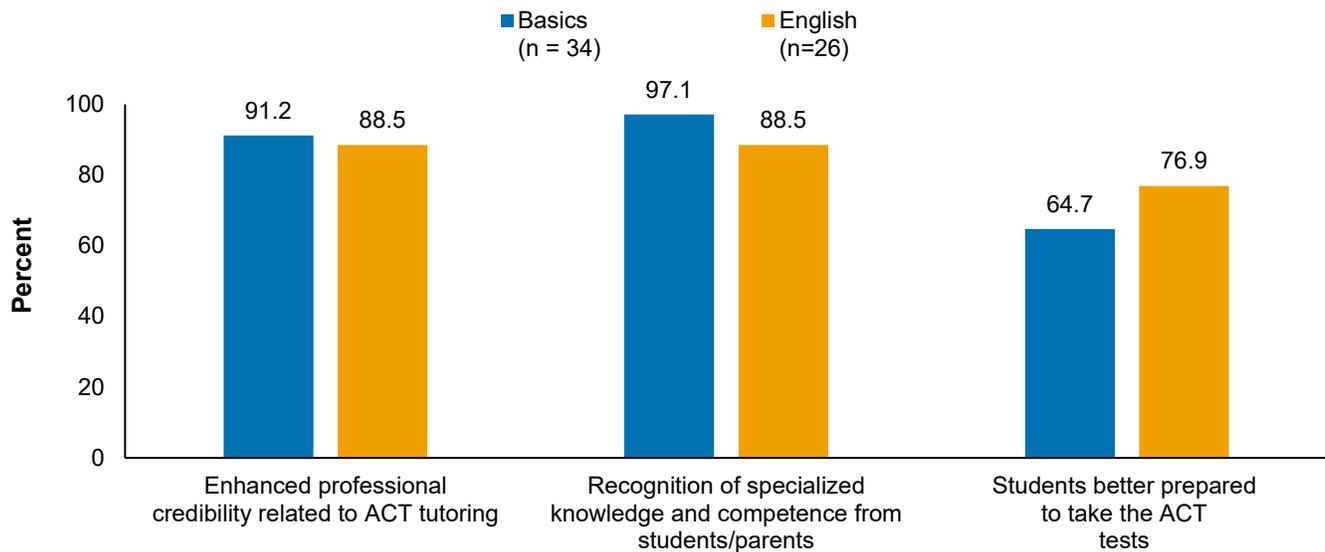
**Figure 3.** Percentage who Responded “a Great Deal” or “a Moderate Amount” of Value or Influence Associated with the Specific Topics Covered in the Course for Respondents who Met the ACT Certified Educator Program Requirements



In terms of the level of influence the specific information has had on respondents' teaching and tutoring strategies, the average percentage of respondents indicating they received “a great deal” or “a moderate amount” of value across the topics covered was 76.0% for the Basics course and 75.6% for the English course.<sup>7</sup> For Basics, the individual percentages per topic ranged from 69.7% for *learning-centered skills* to 90.6% for *resource utilization*. For English, the individual percentages per topic ranged from 73.1% for *identifying and recommending strategies* to 76.9% for the other two topics: *providing individualized tutoring* and *understanding test structure and content*. For both programs and for each general topic covered, fewer than 10% indicated that the specific information had not influenced their teaching and tutoring strategies.

**Outcomes.** Even though the time between the completion of the program and the survey was roughly four months, respondents who met the program requirements indicated that they had experienced some positive outcomes after becoming an ACT Certified Educator. As shown in Figure 4, more than 90% of these respondents agreed or strongly agreed that becoming ACT Basics Certified has given them enhanced professional credibility related to ACT tutoring (91.2%) and recognition of specialized knowledge and competence from students and/or parents (97.1%). The corresponding percentages for becoming ACT English Certified as related to subject specific tutoring were both nearly 90% (Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Percentage who Agreed or Strongly Agreed to Experiencing the Outcome Since Becoming an ACT Certified Educator



Additionally, the majority of respondents indicated that their students are now better prepared to take the ACT test. Specifically, 76.9% agreed or strongly agreed that since they had become ACT English Certified, their students are better prepared to take the ACT English test as compared to their prior students (Figure 4). The corresponding percentage for becoming ACT Basics Certified was lower (64.7% for students being better prepared to take the ACT test). Participants were also asked about their students' ACT Composite or ACT English score gains pre- and post-certification. Within the short time since becoming certified, nearly 40% of the respondents indicated that their recent students reported ACT score gains that were generally larger than the score gains of their prior students (38.7% for Basics and 39.1% for English).<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Overall, these findings suggest that participants' perceptions of the value and effectiveness of the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English training programs have been generally positive. In particular, responses to the survey suggest that participants have:

1. found both programs to be relevant and valuable to their role as an educator,
2. found the topics covered in the training courses to be valuable and influential on their teaching and tutoring strategies, and
3. experienced enhanced professional credibility and recognition from students and parents after becoming certified.

However, there are limitations to the current study worth noting. First, not all program participants responded to the survey (response rate of 60.5%), and respondents did not necessarily provide responses to all of the survey items (individual item response rates ranged from 83.8% to 97.7% for Basics and from 79.3% to 89.7% for English). Additionally, respondents were more likely to have become certified, which may have resulted in more positive findings than if all program participants had responded. That said, a significant percentage of individuals who did not earn the certification responded to the survey: 42.9% for both the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English programs. This compares to 68.5% and 65.9% for those who met the program requirements, respectively.<sup>9</sup> Another limitation is

that the study relied on self-reported survey data. Consequently, respondents could have overstated or understated participant and student outcomes since receiving the certification. We also note that four months may not be enough time for tracking some of the outcomes. Future research will consider collecting and examining information on outcomes at later points in time after participants have completed the program.

Despite these limitations, this initial study collected valuable information from participants that can be used to inform ways the ACT Certified Educator program may be improved to ensure achievement of the program goals, which include enhancing educators' teaching strategies and skills and helping students learn and prepare for their post-high school plans. As the program expands in volume and subject offerings, more rigorous studies that collect student outcomes and contextual factors will be needed to further investigate the impact of the program on student learning.

## Notes

1. ACT Certified Educator Basics and English exam scores and the ACT English score were higher on average for survey respondents than for non-respondents (Table A1).
2. The number of individuals responding to these questions was 45 and 44 (out of a total of 49), respectively.
3. Possible responses included very, moderately, slightly, or not at all. The number of individuals responding to these questions was 42 (out of a total of 43) and 32 (out of a total of 38) for the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English programs, respectively. The six individuals who did not respond to the English questions had participated in the Basics program as well; they provided responses to the survey questions about the Basics program, but they did not provide responses to any of the questions about the English program. The percentages of respondents indicating "not at all" relevant, engaging, or valuable were 4.8%, 11.9%, and 9.5% for the Basics program and 0.0%, 9.4%, and 3.1% for the English program, respectively.
4. The number of individuals responding to these questions was 41 (out of a total of 43) for the

Basics program, 32 (out of a total of 38) for the English program, and 48 (out of a total of 49) for other ACT Certified Educator programs, respectively.

5. The number of individuals responding to this question was 40 (out of a total of 43) and 32 (out of a total of 38) for the ACT Certified Educator Basics and English program, respectively.
6. Across the six Basics and three English topics covered, the number of responses available for analysis from individuals who became ACT<sup>®</sup> Basics Certified<sup>™</sup> was 33 or 34 (out of a total of 37) and ACT English Certified was 26 (out of a total of 29).
7. Across the topics covered, the number of individuals who responded to these questions varied from 32 to 34 (out of a total of 37) for those who became ACT Basics Certified and was 26 (out of a total of 29) for those who became ACT English Certified.
8. The number of individuals who responded to this question was 31 (out of a total of 37) for those who became ACT Basics Certified and 23 (out of a total of 29) for those who became ACT English Certified.
9. We wanted to examine survey responses between those who met and did not meet the program requirements to see if participants' satisfaction with the program was related to becoming certified, but the small sample limited that type of analyses. As an example, we found for the survey responses provided in Figure 1, that the ACT Certified Educator Basics results were not as positive for those who did not meet the program requirements ( $n = 5$ ) than for those who did ( $n = 37$ ). The opposite was true for the ACT Certified Educator English program, where 100% of the respondents who did not meet the program requirements indicated that the program was "very" or "moderately" relevant, engaging, and valuable.

## References

- Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1976). Evaluation of training. In R. L. Craig (Ed.), *Training and development handbook: A guide to human resource development* (2nd ed., pp. 301–319). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Mattern, K. (2019). *ACT's efficacy framework: Combining learning, measurement, and navigation to improve learner outcomes*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** ACT Certified Educator Program Participant Characteristics by Respondent Status

Characteristic	Respondents		Non-respondents		All participants	
	n	% or Mean score	n	% or Mean score	n	% or Mean score
Domestic participant						
Yes	23	46.9	4	12.5	27	33.3
No	26	53.1	28	87.5	54	66.7
Program participation						
Both	32	65.3	20	62.5	52	64.2
Basics only	11	22.5	5	15.6	16	19.8
English only	6	12.2	7	21.9	13	16.1
ACT Basics Certified						
Yes	37	86.0	17	68.0	54	79.4
No	6	14.0	8	32.0	14	20.6
Average Basics certification exam score*	43	42.2	25	36.7	68	40.2
English certification exam						
Pass	31	81.6	16	59.3	47	72.3
Fail	7	18.4	11	40.7	18	27.7
Average English certification exam score*	38	37.8	27	34.4	65	36.4
ACT English score SME-requirement						
Pass	31	81.6	18	66.7	49	75.4
Fail/Not taken	7	18.4	9	33.3	16	24.6
Average ACT English score*	38	25.6	26	22.2	64	24.2
ACT English Certified						
Yes	29	76.3	15	55.6	44	67.7
No	9	23.7	12	44.4	21	32.3

Note. SME = subject matter expert. Individuals could retake the ACT English test if they did not initially meet the required threshold for certification.

\* Mean score provided. For context, the Basics certification exam score ranges from 0 to 55. The English certification exam score ranges from 0 to 47. The ACT English score ranges from 1 to 36.

**Table A2.** Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	11	23.9
Female	35	76.1
Domestic participant		
Yes	23	46.9
No	26	53.1
Highest degree earned		
Bachelor's degree	13	28.3
Master's degree	28	60.9
PhD/JD/EDD	4	8.7
Other	1	2.2
Current occupation		
Teacher	18	45.0
Administrator	6	15.0
Tutor or instructional coach	8	20.0
Teacher and tutor	2	5.0
Other*	6	15.0

*Note.* The participant characteristics shown in the table were not available for those who did not respond to the survey. Percentages based on those responding to the individual survey item.

\* Other includes consultants, specialists, and testing coordinators.

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### **Justine Radunzel, PhD**

Justine Radunzel is a principal research scientist in Validity and Efficacy Research specializing in postsecondary outcomes research and validity evidence for the ACT test.

### **Krista Mattern, PhD**

Krista Mattern is a senior director in Validity and Efficacy Research whose research focuses on predicting education and workplace success through evaluating the validity and fairness of cognitive and non-cognitive measures. Also known for work in evaluating the efficacy of learning products to help improve intended learner outcomes.

### **Jeff Schiel, PhD**

Jeff Schiel, director of Survey Research at ACT, specializes in the design and methodology of surveys and survey sampling. His interests also include SAS programming and statistical graphics.

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