PreACT®-Tested Students in the 2025 ACT®-Tested Graduating Class: A Summary of Performance and Growth

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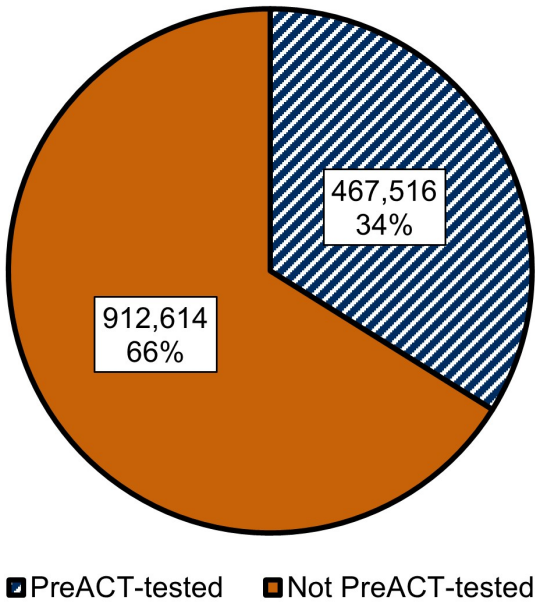
Among students in the 2025 ACT-tested graduating class, over 467,000 took PreACT 8/9®, PreACT, or PreACT® Secure™ before taking the ACT. In this issue brief, we compare the ACT scores and college enrollment rates of students who took a PreACT test with those of students who did not. We also examine average PreACT-to-ACT gain scores by performance in high school courses, racial/ethnic group, and family income level. Figure 1 shows the number of students in the 2025 ACT-tested graduating class by PreACT testing status.

Figure 1. Number of Students in 2025 ACT-Tested Graduating Class, by PreACT Testing Status

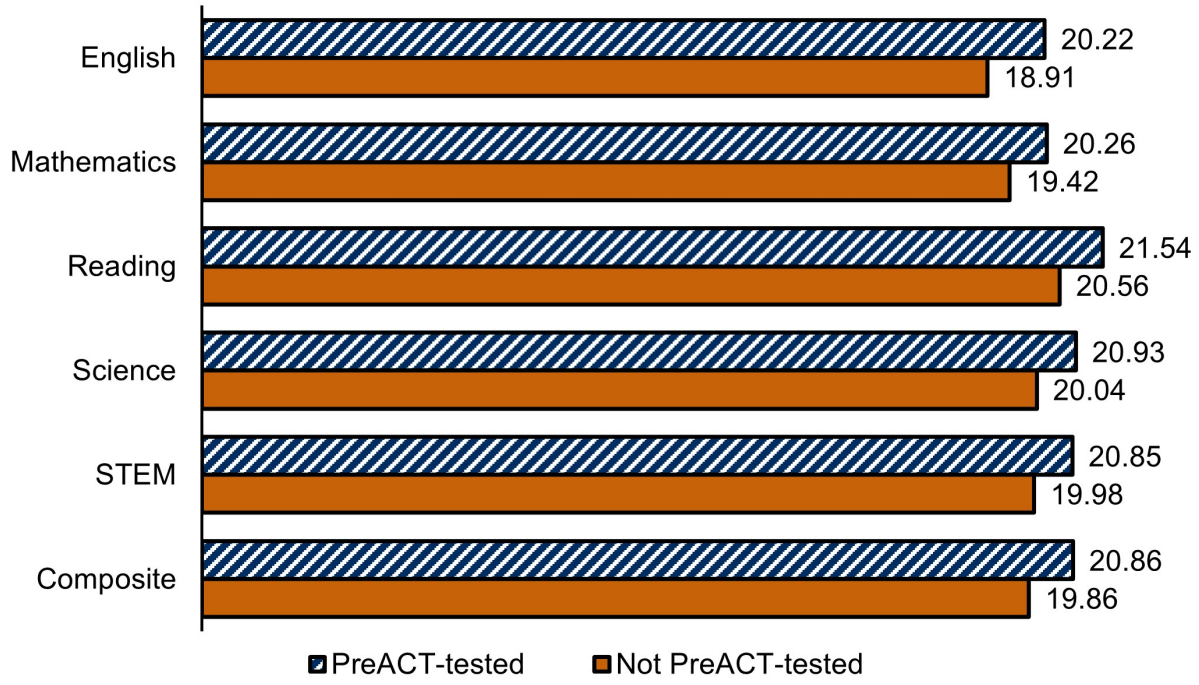


Note. N = 1,380,130 for the 2025 ACT-tested graduating class. Scores from students' first PreACT 8/9, PreACT, or PreACT Secure test are used for the gain score analyses in this report: 101,004 students took PreACT 8/9 as their first test, 307,224 took PreACT as their first test, and 59,288 took PreACT Secure as their first test.

Finding 1: PreACT-tested students scored higher on the ACT and were more likely to be ready for college courses.

The average ACT score for students who took a PreACT test was higher than that for students who did not (Figure 2). Results varied across states, but on average, the state mean ACT Composite score was 20.86 for students who took PreACT and 19.86 for students who did not.

Figure 2. Mean ACT Scores by PreACT Testing Status

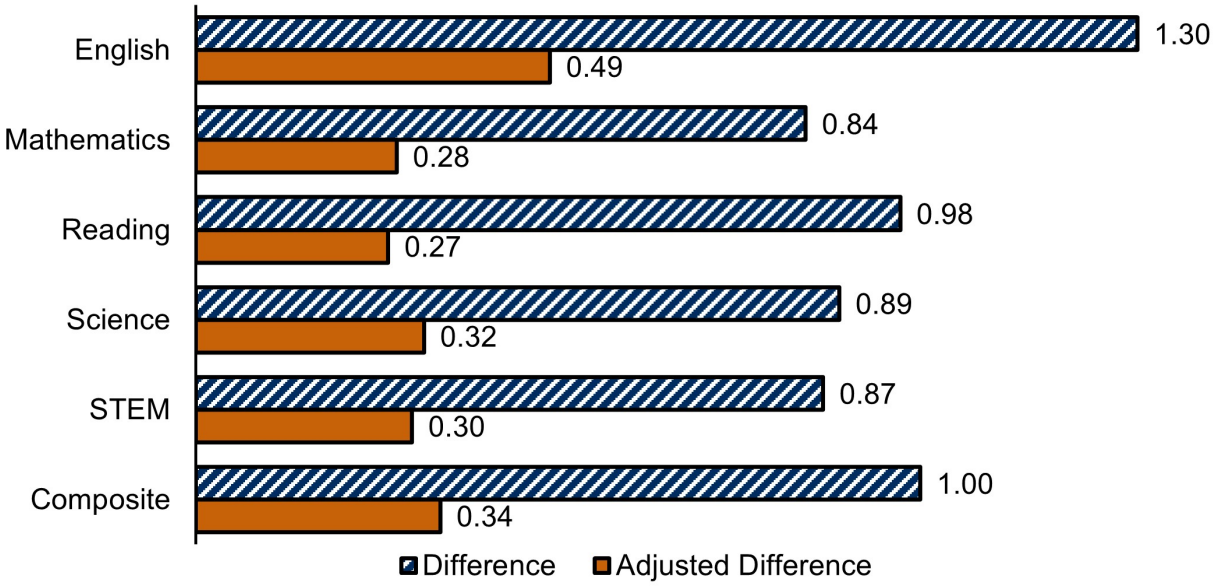


Note. For each state, mean ACT scores were obtained for students who took PreACT and for students who did not. To ensure that the state mean scores could be reliably estimated, we included only states with at least 1,000 PreACT-tested students in the 2025 ACT-tested graduating class. The mean scores were then averaged across 32 states to produce Figure 2, representing the typical mean scores observed across states.

The difference in average scores ranged from 0.84 for mathematics to 1.30 for English (Figure 3). The PreACT and No PreACT groups are not randomly equivalent. Differences between the two groups may be due to factors other than taking a PreACT test. We therefore used linear regression to estimate the adjusted difference between the two groups, accounting for academic and background variables associated with ACT scores. The adjusted difference provides an estimate of what the difference between the average ACT scores of the PreACT and No PreACT groups would be if the groups had the same academic and background variables. The variables included the ACT Rigor Index (a measure of high school grades and course rigor; Allen & Mattern, 2019), student demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, and family income level), high school characteristics (public/private status and school mean ACT Composite score), and months remaining until high school graduation (determined by ACT test

date). After the statistical adjustment, the differences in mean scores were much smaller, as shown in Figure 3.

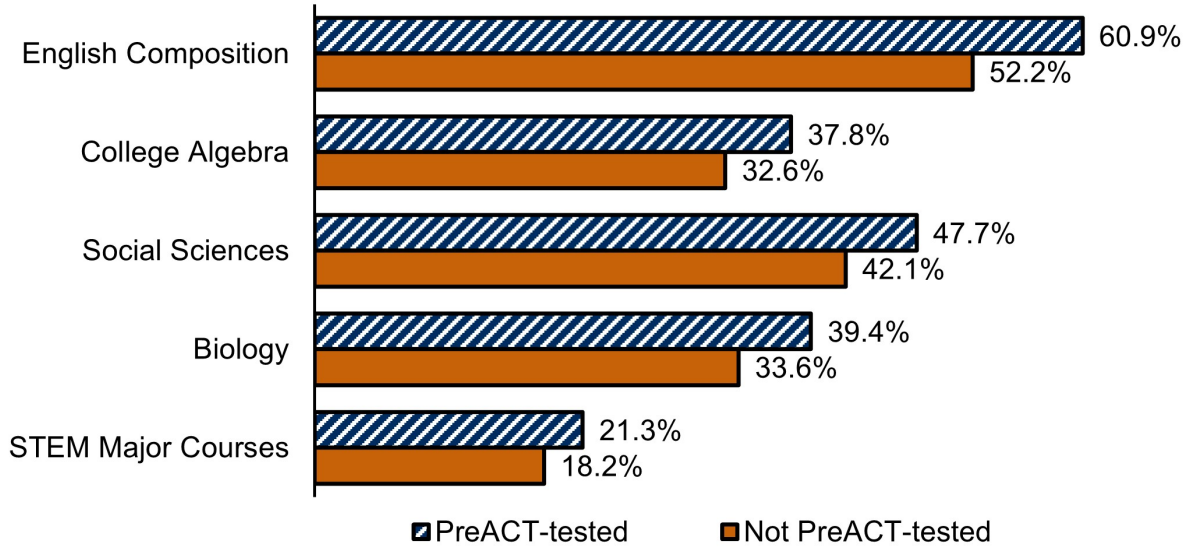
Figure 3. Difference in Mean ACT Scores (PreACT Group − No PreACT Group)



Note. The results are averaged across 32 states.

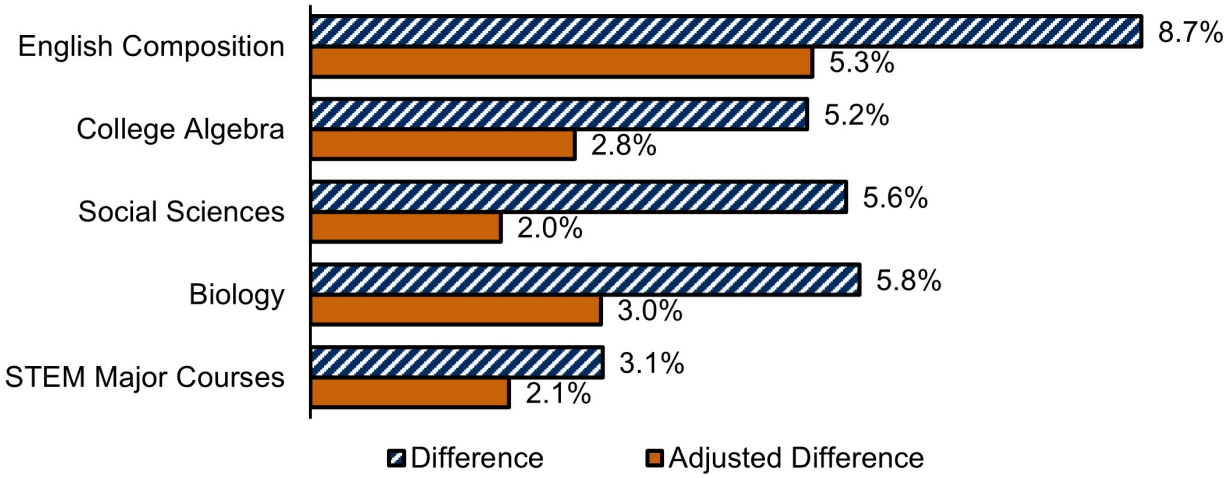
The difference in average ACT scores means that PreACT-tested students are more likely to be ready for first-year college courses and earn exemptions from remedial coursework. Figure 4 shows the percentage of students meeting each ACT College Readiness Benchmark by PreACT testing status. We obtained the percentages in Figure 4 by averaging percentages from 32 states.

Figure 4. Percentage Ready for First-Year College Courses, by PreACT Testing Status



The difference in readiness for college courses ranged from 3.1% for courses commonly taken by STEM majors to 8.7% for English Composition (Figure 5). After we made the statistical adjustments described earlier, the differences in college readiness were smaller. The adjusted differences in college readiness rates favor PreACT-tested students, with adjusted differences ranging from 2.0% for social science courses to 5.3% for English Composition.

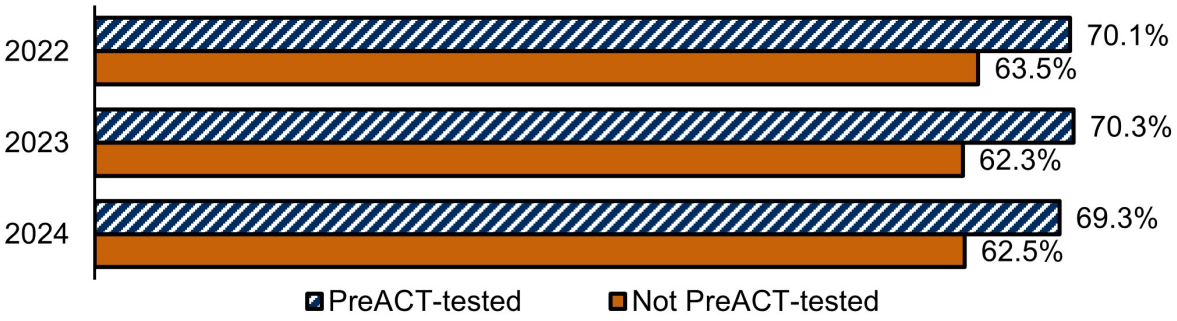
Figure 5. Difference in College Readiness Rates (PreACT Group − No PreACT Group)



Finding 2: College enrollment rates are higher for PreACT-tested students.

For ACT-tested high school graduates of 2022, 2023, and 2024, we compared college enrollment rates by PreACT testing status. For all three cohorts, college enrollment rates were higher for the PreACT group than the No PreACT group (Figure 6). We obtained the college enrollment rates presented in Figure 6 by averaging rates from states that had at least 1,000 PreACT-tested students in the respective ACT-tested graduating class (2022, 2023, or 2024).

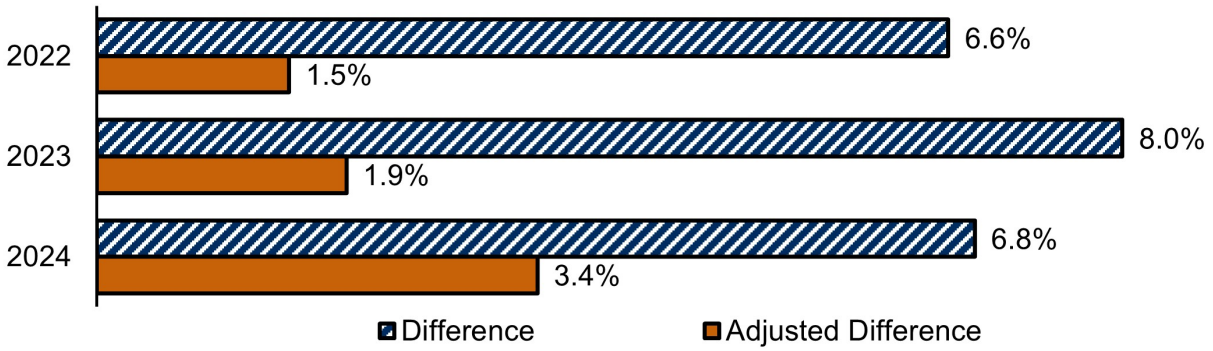
Figure 6. College Enrollment Rates, by Cohort Year and PreACT Testing Status



Note. We used college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse. We considered students enrolled if they were enrolled at a postsecondary institution for any term beginning during their year of high school graduation or between January 1 and March 1 of the year after their high school graduation.

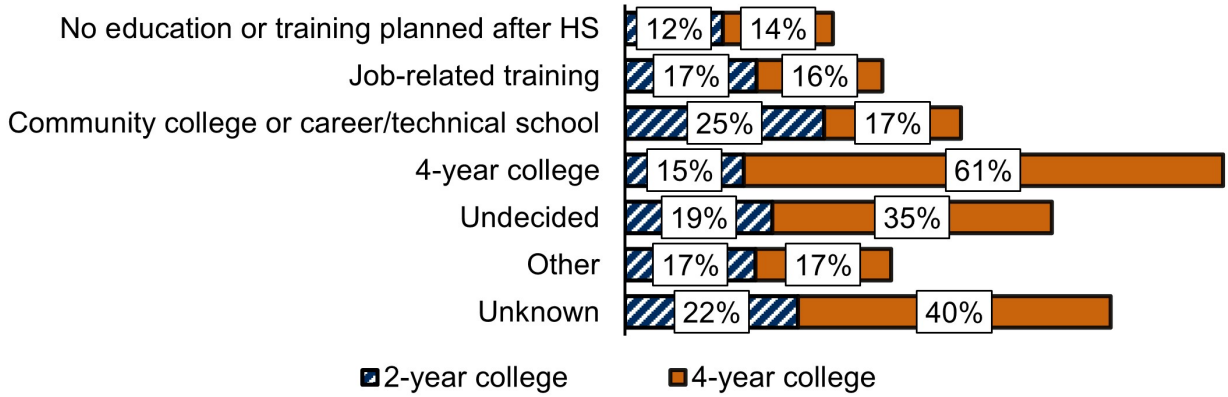
The PreACT and No PreACT groups are not randomly equivalent. Group differences in college enrollment may be due to factors other than taking a PreACT test. After being statistically adjusted for high school grades and course rigor, student demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, and family income), high school characteristics, and months remaining until high school graduation (determined by ACT test date), the differences in college enrollment rates were much smaller (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Differences in College Enrollment Rates (PreACT Group − No PreACT Group), by Cohort Year



As part of the PreACT 8/9 and PreACT assessments, students complete a survey that includes a question about their educational plans. Using the survey data, we examined college enrollment rates for students within each educational plan group, combining data for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 ACT-tested graduating cohorts (Figure 8). Response rates for the survey question were 61%, 54%, and 55% for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts, respectively.

Figure 8. College Enrollment Rates Among PreACT-Tested Students, by Institution Type and Educational Plans

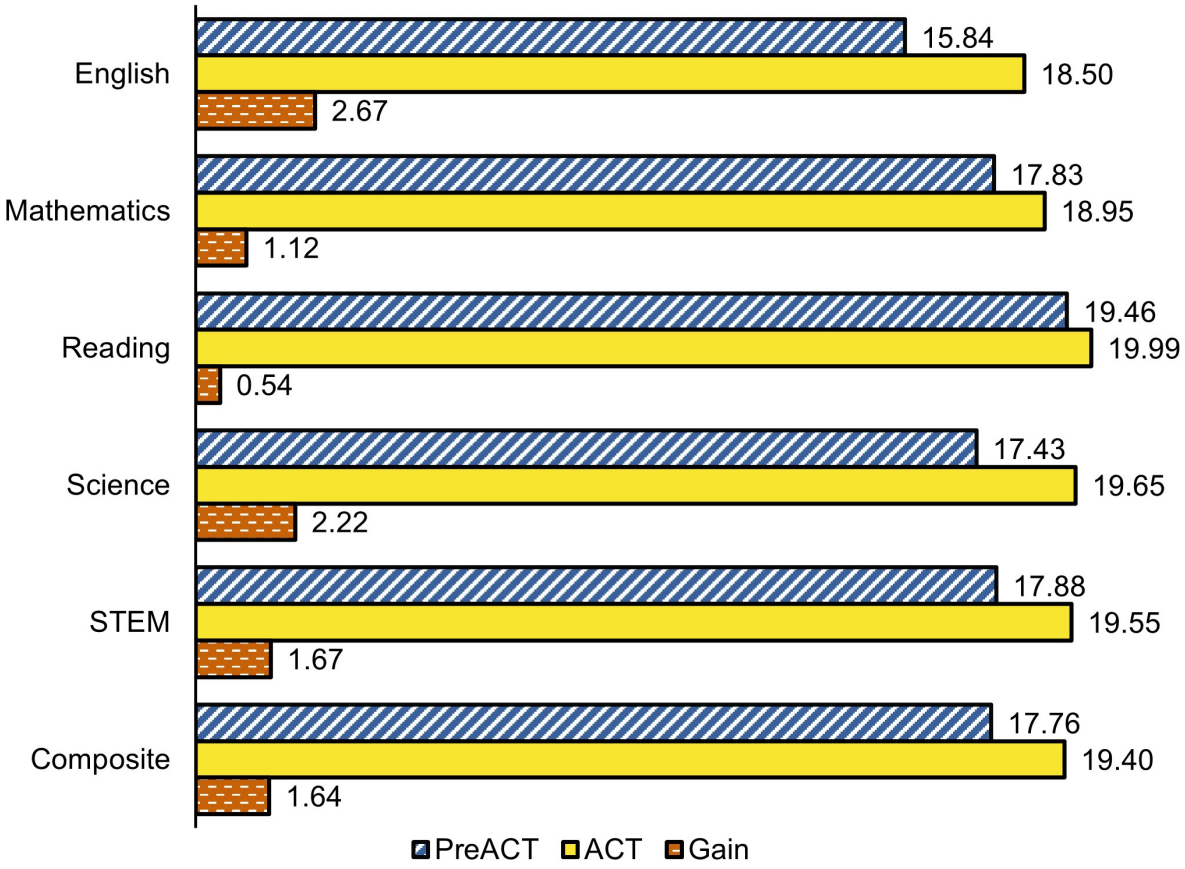


As expected, college enrollment rates were higher for students who planned to attend college, especially for those who planned to attend a 4-year college. Among students who had no education or training planned, 26% still enrolled in college, with 14% enrolling at 4-year colleges and 12% enrolling at 2-year colleges. This suggests that student plans often change during the last few years of high school. PreACT and ACT testing programs can help provide all students with guidance concerning postsecondary opportunities.

Finding 3: Average gain from PreACT to the ACT varies across subjects.

Figure 9 shows the average PreACT and ACT scores for the 467,516 students who took both a PreACT test and the ACT. For students who took multiple PreACT assessments, their first test was used for this analysis. The average gain from PreACT to the ACT varied across subjects, from a low of 0.54 points in reading to a high of 2.67 in English. The average Composite gain was 1.64 points.

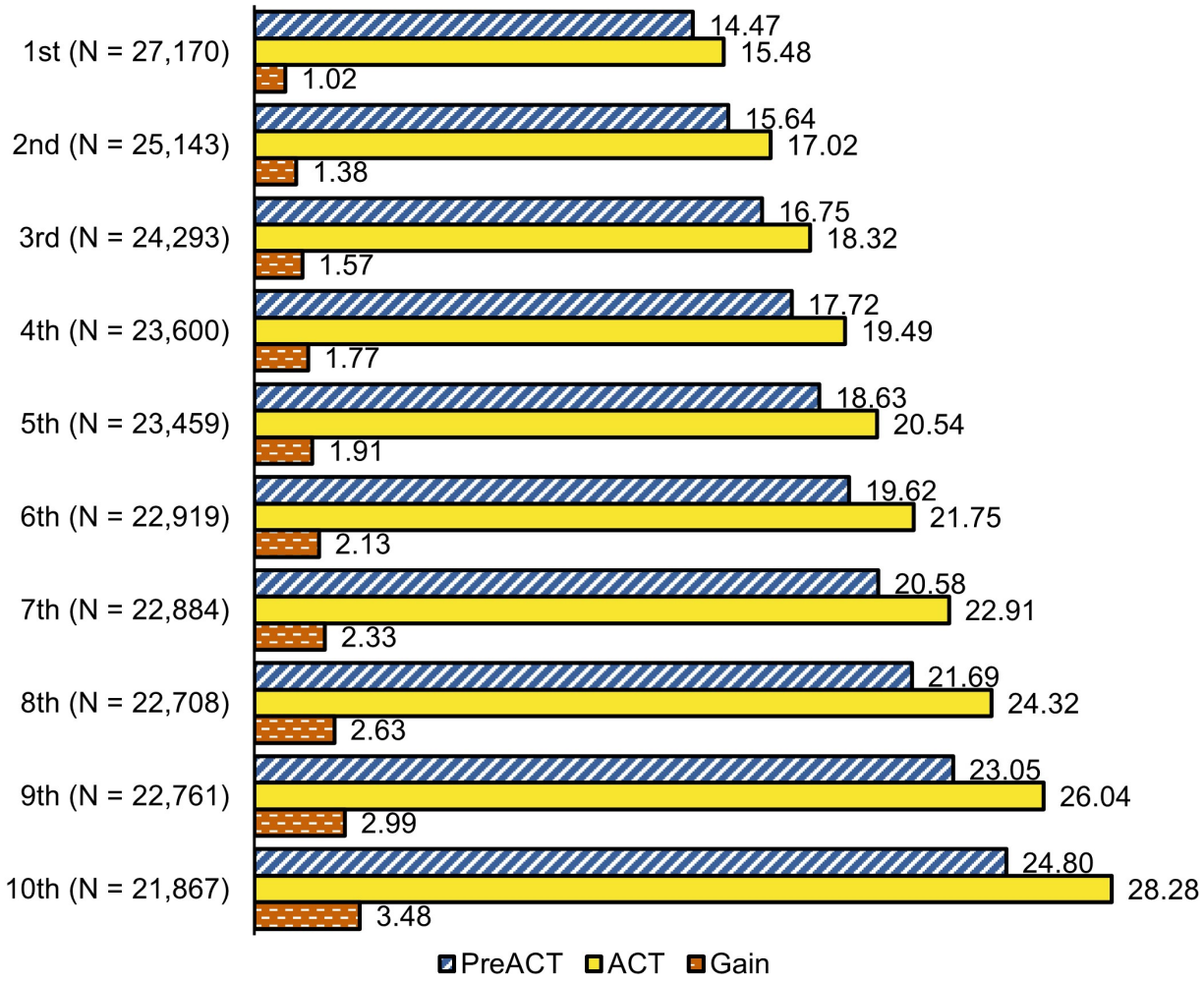
Figure 9. Average PreACT, ACT, and Gain Scores



Finding 4: Average gain from PreACT to the ACT increases with course rigor and performance.

The average Composite gain steadily increased with grades earned and the rigor of high school coursework (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Average PreACT, ACT, and Composite Gain Scores, by High School Grades and Rigor Decile

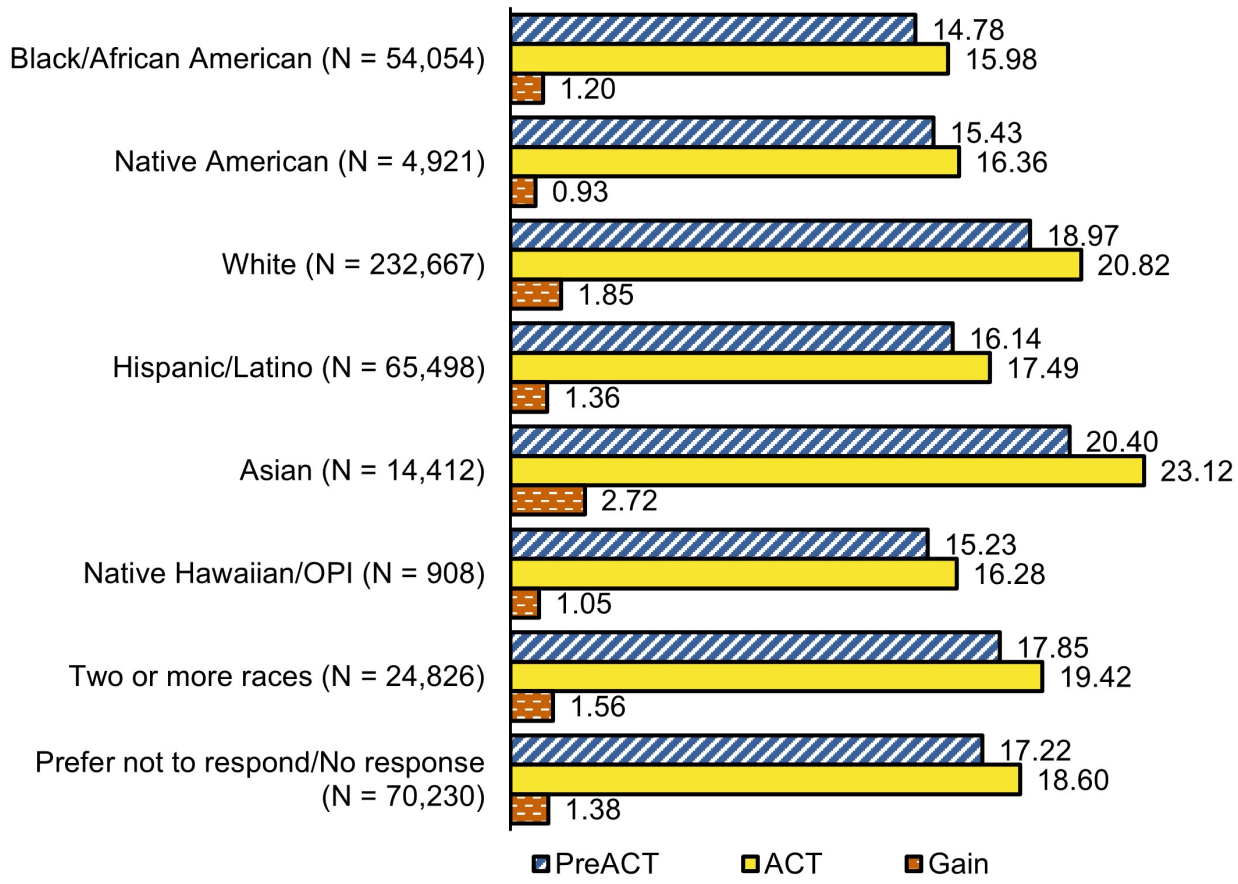


Note. This chart is based on data from 236,804 students who took a PreACT test and the ACT and reported their high school coursework and grades when they registered for the ACT. The high school grades and rigor decile are based on the ACT Rigor Index, which is similar to high school GPA but awards more points for taking more difficult courses (Allen & Mattern, 2019). The ACT Rigor Index is based on student-reported grades in up to 30 different high school courses; it incorporates indicators for advanced coursework and students' plans for taking upper-level STEM courses (chemistry, physics, advanced math, and calculus).

Finding 5: Average gains from PreACT to the ACT are lower for underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, and the difference is partly explained by course performance, course rigor, and school characteristics.

Figure 11 shows the average PreACT and ACT Composite scores by race/ethnicity. The average Composite gain from a PreACT test to the ACT varied across racial/ethnic groups, from a low of 0.93 points for Native American students to a high of 2.72 for Asian students.

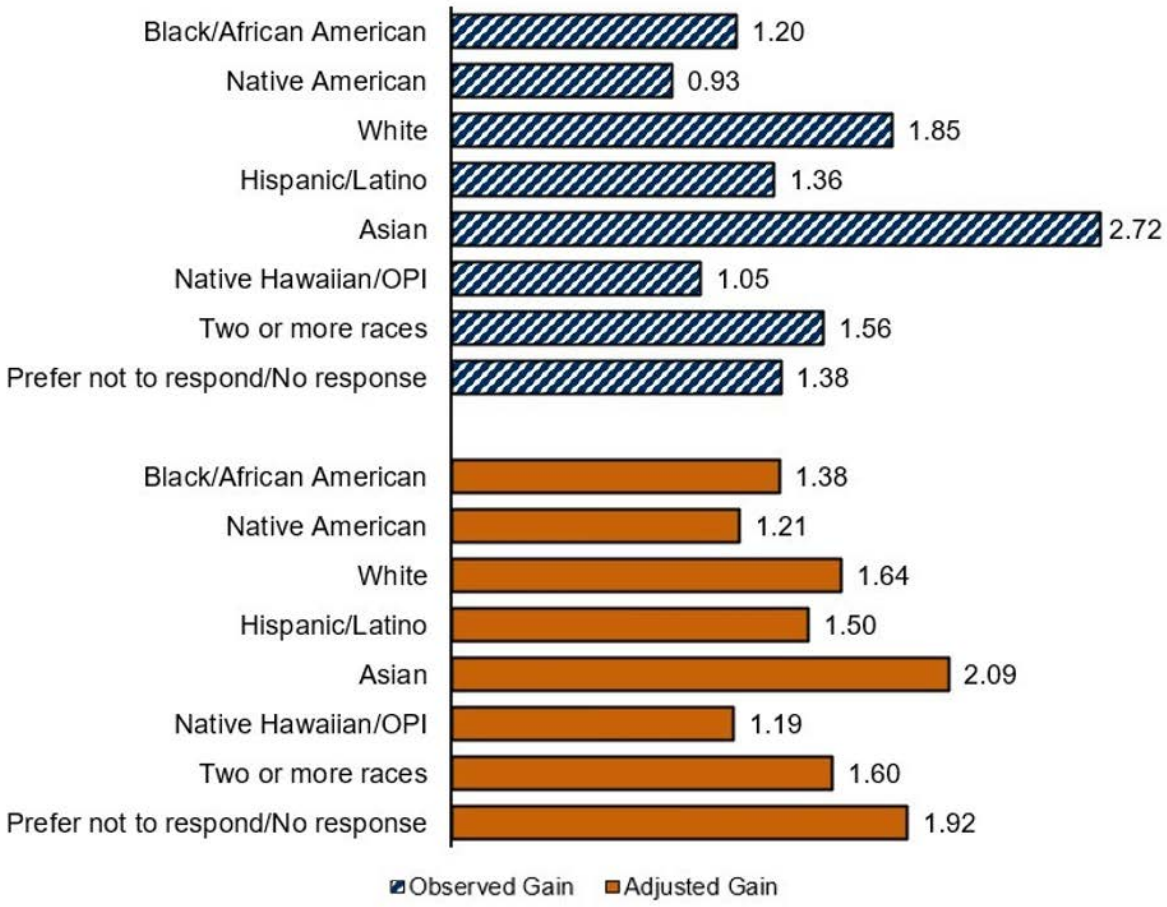
Figure 11. Average PreACT, ACT, and Composite Gain Scores, by Race/Ethnicity



Note. OPI = Other Pacific Islander

Figure 12 shows both the observed average gain scores by race/ethnicity and the average gain scores after they were statistically adjusted for high school grades and course rigor, high school characteristics, and the number of months between tests. Relative to the differences in observed gain scores, those for the adjusted gain scores across racial/ethnic groups are smaller.

Figure 12. Average Composite Gains by Race/Ethnicity



Note. OPI = Other Pacific Islander

Finding 6: Average gains from PreACT to the ACT increased with family income level, but much of the increase is explained by course performance, course rigor, and school characteristics.

The average Composite gain from a PreACT test to the ACT increased with family income (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Average PreACT and ACT Composite Scores, by Family Income

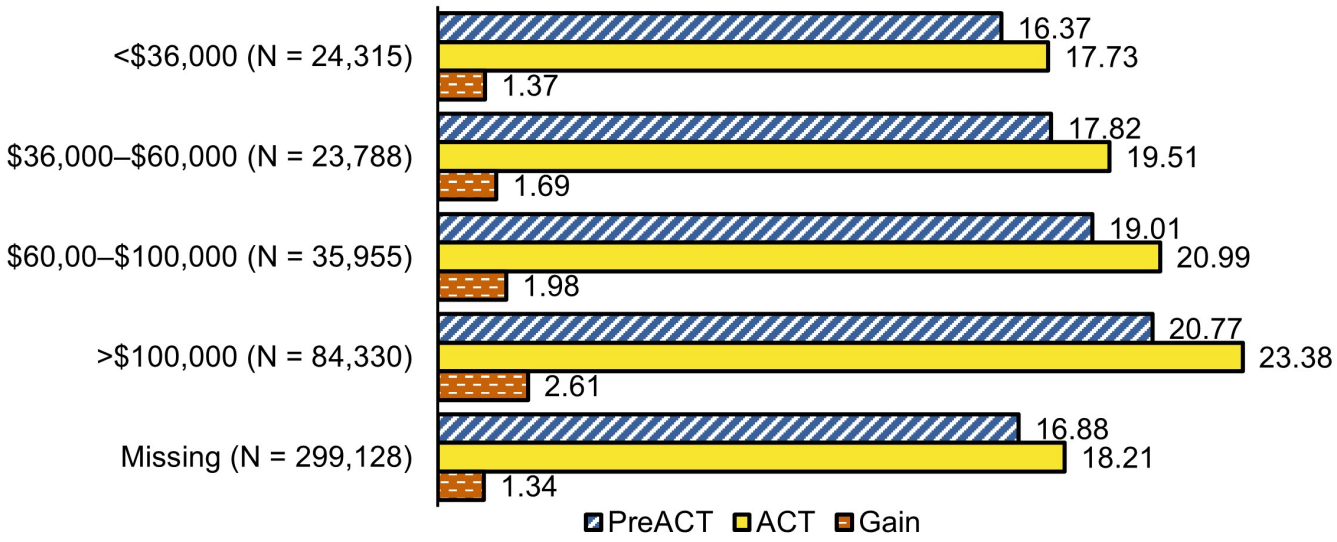
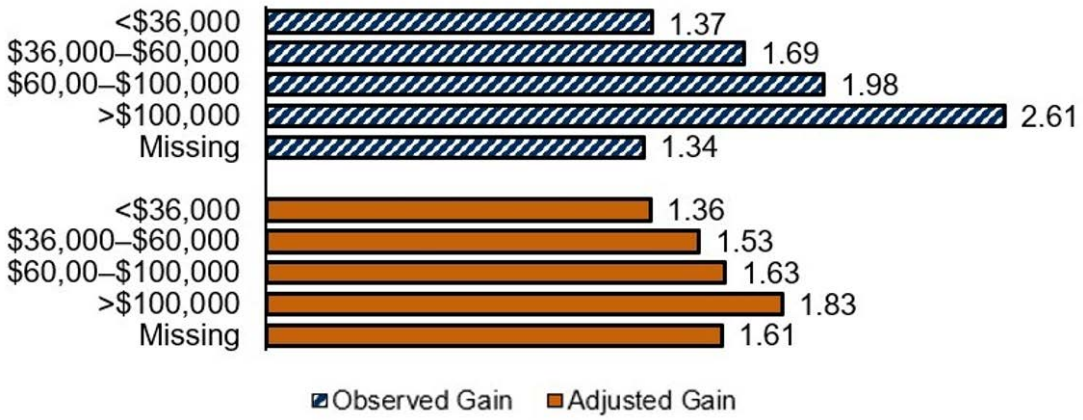


Figure 14 shows both the observed average gain scores by family income level and the average gain scores after they were statistically adjusted for high school grades and course rigor, high school characteristics, and the number of months between tests. Relative to the differences in observed gain scores, those for the adjusted gain scores across family income levels are much smaller.

Figure 14. Average Composite Gains by Family Income



References

Allen, J., & Mattern, K. (2019). Examination of indices of high school performance based on the graded response model. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *38*(2), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12250

About the Author

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Jeff Allen, PhD, is a principal research scientist at ACT. He specializes in longitudinal research of educational outcomes, student growth models, and validation of college readiness measures.

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