

ACT State & Federal Policy Issue Brief



ACT®

Senior School-Day Retest Offers Meaningful Second Opportunity

Jeremy Heneger

Everyone deserves to put their best effort forward. This is especially true for students who are trying to demonstrate their readiness for college and career. To help students accomplish their college or work pathway, many states require or offer students the choice to take the ACT® in the spring of their junior year. A growing number of states and districts also offer their students a second chance on a school day to demonstrate college readiness on the ACT in the fall of their senior year.

Research conducted by ACT indicates there are multiple benefits for districts and states that adopt senior retesting (Allen & Dingler, 2023).

- Increase in access to senior retesting for students from all types of demographic backgrounds. For instance, among school-day retesters 35% came from households earning under \$50,000 as compared to Saturday
- Increase in postsecondary qualifications and scholarships. The share of school-day retesters achieving a 21 ACT Composite or greater increases by 18%. Some states use a 21 or higher ACT Composite score to qualify students for state scholarships.
- Increase in the number of students demonstrating readiness for postsecondary admissions. If ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks are used default for qualifying for credit-bearing courses then the percent increase of school-day retesters meeting the Benchmark is 17% for English, 24% for math, and 23% for reading and science.
- Decrease in test anxiety and increase in motivation to learn. Research indicates that becoming familiar with a test's format and length—which can be achieved by retesting—can reduce test anxiety.
- Retesting can provide support for research

and evaluation. Administering the ACT at two different points in time provides a solid foundation for research into the effectiveness of learning programs that occur between the two administrations.

The ACT brief “Examining Benefits of School-Day ACT Senior Retesting”

“The ACT retake allows high school seniors to have an additional opportunity to boost ACT scores, potentially opening up new scholarship funding and improving possibilities of admission to competitive college programs. The ACT retake is just one of the ways Tennessee shows its commitment to providing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate post-secondary readiness.”

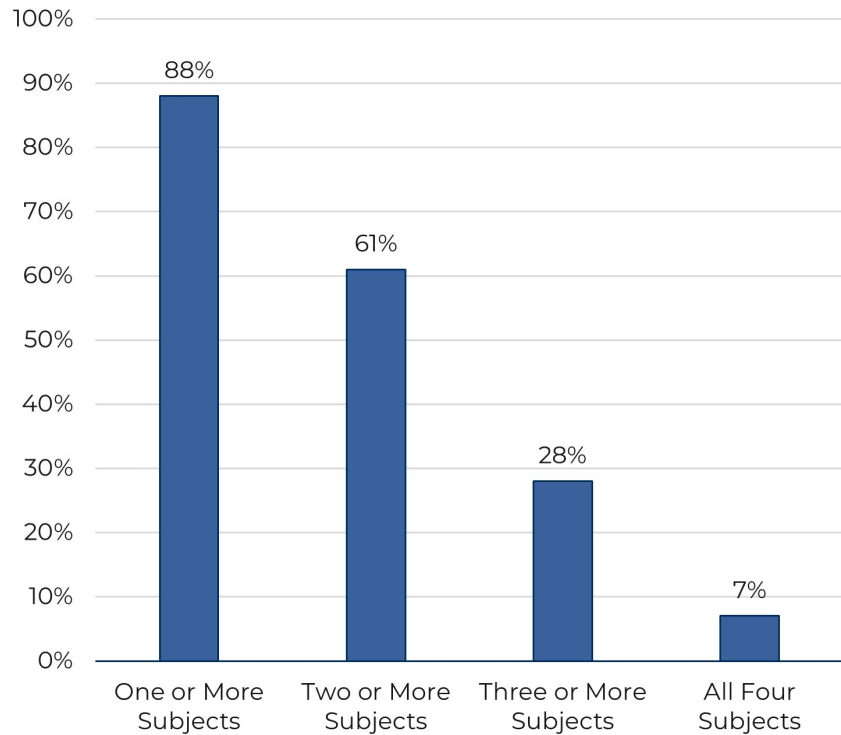
***—Lizzette Reynolds,
Tennessee's
Commissioner of
Education***

examined data from students who took a school-day test in both the spring of their junior year and during the fall of their senior year in 2022. ACT analyzed over 1,300 schools across 40 states with 168,284 students, and the data indicated that for approximately 38% of schools, the senior retest was likely optional. The current brief offers a closer look at the evidence-based benefits of a senior retest. Increased ACT scores equate to real-world opportunities for students and savings for families of students pursuing postsecondary education options. Higher ACT scores can help students gain admission to colleges and universities, but this is just one of the benefits. Higher ACT scores also help students access state scholarships and contend for competitive scholarships. ACT scores can also lead to savings in time and money by helping students place into higher-level courses, allowing them to skip remedial and prerequisite classes and reduce the overall cost and time needed to earn a degree.

State Success Stories: Tennessee and Wyoming

During the 2024–2025 school year, four states (Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Wyoming) offered optional senior retest opportunities to

Figure 1. Percent of Tennessee Retesters with Subject Score Increases for Fall 2024



their students. This section focuses on emerging learning and best practices from Wyoming and Tennessee's experience with senior retesting.

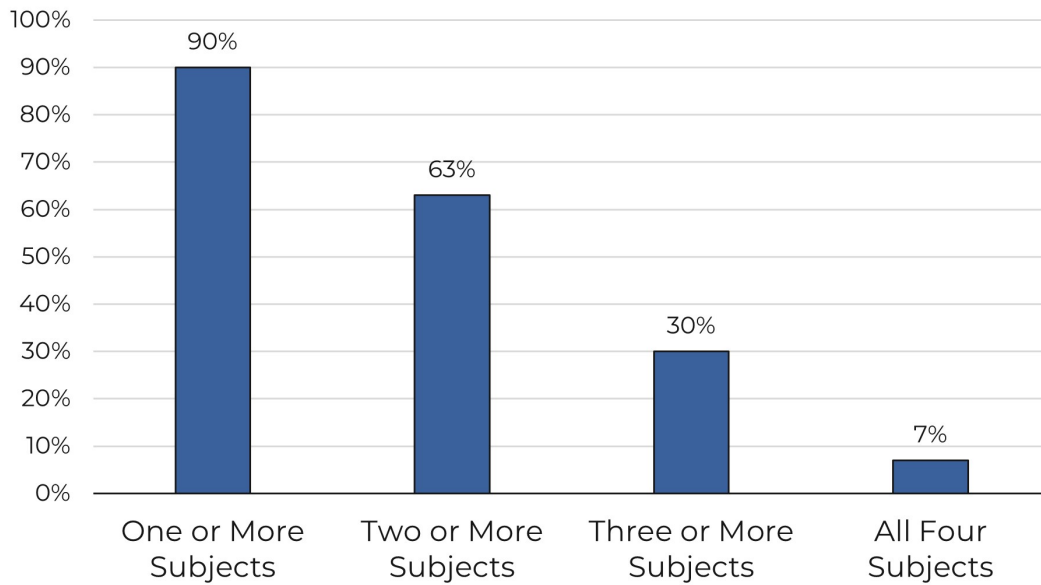
Tennessee was the first state to offer a senior retest, and it has been going strong since 2017. Senior retests have a proven track record of providing students with an additional opportunity to demonstrate college and career readiness.

In the fall of 2024, over 52,000 Tennessee seniors embraced the senior retest opportunity provided by the state. This represents more than 70% of the senior class. Eighty-eight

percent of Tennessee retesters improved at least one of their section scores (reading, English, mathematics, and science) (Figure 1). Forty-four percent of retesters improved their Composite score, and among that group, the average increase was 2 points.

In contrast, Wyoming has a much smaller population. Wyoming's senior retest program began in 2022 and has also positively impacted its students. In the fall of 2024, 1,749, or 27%, of Wyoming seniors participated in the optional retest. Among retesters, 90% improved at least one

Figure 2. Percent of Wyoming Retesters with Subject Score Increases for Fall 2024



section score (Figure 2). Forty-eight percent of retesters improved their Composite score; the average increase was 2 points among that group.

Scholarship Opportunities

Both Tennessee and Wyoming have a state scholarship for which students can use an ACT score to qualify. Tennessee’s HOPE Scholarship is funded through net proceeds from the state lottery and awarded to entering freshmen enrolled at an eligible postsecondary institution within 16 months after graduating from an eligible high school in Tennessee. One way for entering freshmen to be eligible is to score a 21 or higher on the ACT.

Based on the results from spring testing in their junior year, 21,347 students qualified for the HOPE Scholarship by scoring a 21 or higher on the ACT. One third of students qualifying for the HOPE Scholarship do so based on the senior school-day retest.

An additional 3,678 students qualified for the HOPE Scholarship by

scoring a 21 or higher on the optional fall retest (Table 1). This is more than a 17% increase in the number of students who qualified for the scholarship in the preceding spring. Each of these students would have a maximum award of \$20,400 if they attended a 4-year public institution in Tennessee and remained eligible for all four years.

Combined, the fall retest resulted in those 3,678 students having access to a maximum award of more than \$75 million in financial aid.

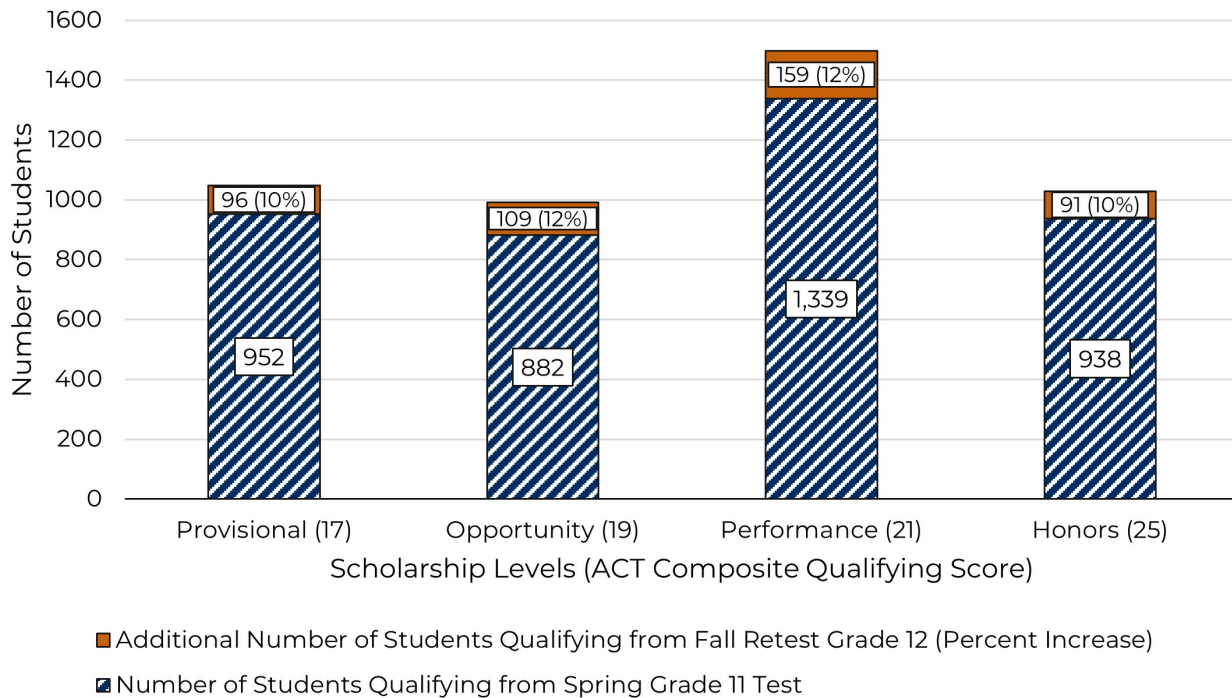
Wyoming’s Hathaway Scholarship helps qualifying Wyoming students attend the University of Wyoming or any of the state’s community colleges. The Hathaway Scholarship has

Table 1. Increase in Students Eligible for Tennessee’s HOPE Scholarship after Optional Senior Fall Retest

Year of spring/fall ACT test	Students qualifying for HOPE Scholarship with ACT score during state spring test	Benefit of fall testing: additional students qualifying for HOPE Scholarship throughout fall test	Percent increase from fall retest	Amount of HOPE Scholarship support students could access with fall ACT test scores*
2024	21,347	3,678	17%	\$75,031,200

*Estimated based on \$20,400 of HOPE Scholarship funding available during four years of college

Figure 3. Increase in Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship Qualifiers Based on Spring Grade 11 Testing and Fall Grade 12 Optional Retesting



four award levels. The Provisional level requires a Composite ACT score of 17; the highest level, Honors, requires a Composite ACT score of 25. The optional fall retest in 2024 allowed 455 students to qualify or increase their level of qualification (Figure 3). These score increases resulted in almost \$2 million in maximum award increases.¹

Course Placement and Remediation Exemption

ACT section scores are commonly used to determine beginning

courses for students entering college, including public institutions in both Tennessee and Wyoming. In some cases, scores are used to determine if a student is ready for entry-level courses; if not, students may need to take remedial courses that need to be completed before entry-level courses and often do not count for credit towards a degree or certificate. In some systems, a corequisite course is required at the same time as an entry-level course. Both corequisite and

remedial courses are used to build skills needed for entry-level courses and are required to increase the

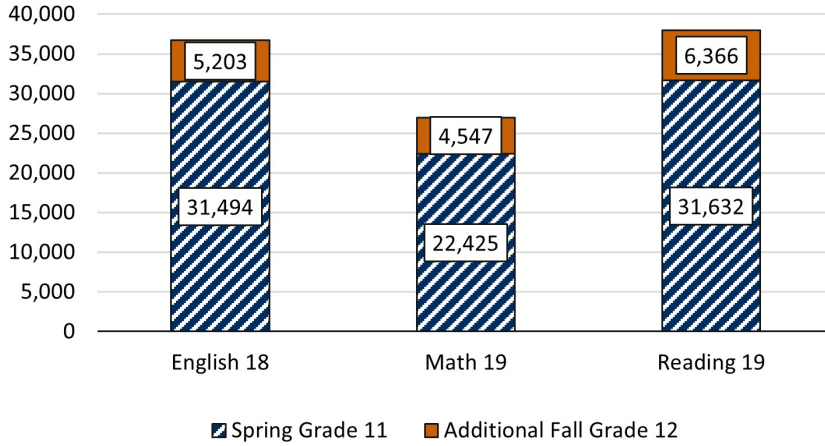
“Wyoming’s senior retest opportunity has saved students time and money for post-secondary remediation, where colleges and universities within the state use ACT scores to determine course placement.”

—Laurie Hernandez, Director of Standards & Assessments, Wyoming Department of Education

¹ The maximum award increases were calculated assuming 100% enrollment and that students

remained eligible and enrolled for 8 semesters.

Figure 4. Number of Students that Improved Scores between Spring and Fall Testing to Meet Tennessee Board of Regents Benchmarks



chances for students to complete those entry-level courses.

Tennessee’s Board of Regents has a strong corequisite course policy that has established benchmarks in writing, reading, and math. Scores from the 2024 senior retest resulted in an additional 6,366 students meeting the benchmark of 19 on the ACT reading test and their bypassing the corequisite course (Figure 4). This was

a 20% increase in the number of students meeting the benchmark from spring testing. Similarly, 4,547 students reached the math benchmark, while 5,203 students met the writing benchmark with 20% and 17% increases over spring results, respectively. These gains mean students can save time by enrolling directly in credit-bearing courses during their freshman year. Tennessee

institutions also benefit by conserving resources to better support students with the greatest needs.

Wyoming students who plan to attend the University of Wyoming need to score an 18 on the English test to avoid a remedial course. In mathematics, there are several placement levels for students. A score of 21 on the mathematics test is needed for the Algebra course. A 23 is needed for College Algebra, and a 27 is needed for Calculus I. The fall retest in 2024 resulted in 455 instances of students reaching these cut scores, making them eligible for higher placement levels (Table 2). Each time a student avoids a remedial course in Wyoming, they save approximately the average course cost of \$460; conservative estimates calculate savings to students and their families at over \$200,000. This estimate was derived by calculating the number of

Table 2. Number of Wyoming Students Meeting Course Placement Levels in the Spring 2025 and Additional Students Meeting in Fall of 2025

Course placement	Qualifying score	Number of students meeting spring grade 11	Additional number of students meeting fall grade 12	Percent increase
English	English 18	3,186	207	7%
WY University Algebra placement	Math 21	409	76	19%
WY University College Algebra placement	Math 23	950	119	13%
WY University Calculus I placement	Math 27	528	53	10%

times students reached remediation exemption or placement levels and multiplying by the average course cost of \$460.

General Benefits of Senior Retesting

The data discussed above shows concrete benefits of state senior-retesting programs. Another benefit might be harder to quantify but is no less important: senior retesting builds on the importance of continual growth. Giving students a second chance to test reinforces the idea that student achievement is not fixed; through hard work and dedication, students can continue to learn and improve their readiness for the postsecondary world. The importance of growth is demonstrated not only to students but also to other stakeholders. “Senioritis,” or academic letdown, is so prevalent that a National Commission was founded in 2000 to investigate the issue (Pickhardt, 2013). The research also indicated that senioritis has negative consequences for students who go to college. Reminding seniors that their final year of high school is an opportunity to grow (as opposed to coast) can be an important step to combat senioritis. Taking advantage of the opportunity to grow that a senior year provides is important for students, families, and educators.

The actions of educational leaders and policymakers can reinforce the importance of growth. Educational leaders can establish the importance of growth by developing processes that encourage both educators and students to examine results. When students and educators, either together or separately, examine results from the junior administration of the ACT, it is possible for both groups to develop understandings about where students are about their level of achievement individually or by cohort. This is an opportunity for students to determine if they are satisfied with their performance and whether it aligns with their postsecondary goals. For educators, this is a chance to see how effectively programs are preparing all students for college and career.

Taking stock of where we are and setting goals to get where we want to be is an important part of adopting an attitude of continual improvement. Schools and districts can further develop programs or interventions that help students continue to grow toward their goals. Educational leaders can use the senior retest to help evaluate the effectiveness of both programs and interventions. Educational leaders also have an opportunity to celebrate

the successes of both programs and individuals. Celebrating success further reinforces the importance of growth.

Too often, education systems test and review results but then forget to use the results. Institutions that develop robust ways to use assessment results are bound to have better outcomes. School leaders can develop systematic ways to review and use the results for goal setting. This would be best done at the end of the junior year and before students enroll in courses for the following fall. Counselors and content area teachers would have important roles in helping students understand their results and using those results to chart their future. Using assessment results and goals to guide course

“I was not going to take it [the ACT] anymore, but I decided to give the senior retake a try. I went to tutoring before and after school, and worked on some skills within my classes. I raised my score to a 30, and qualified for 20,000 more dollars of scholarship money.”

***—Senior student,
Jefferson County High
School***

selection is more likely to yield favorable outcomes.

Another important step is reviewing senior retest results to determine whether students met their goals. Educators can support this process by helping students interpret their scores and consider how their results align with their post-high school pathway. Some students may still be dissatisfied with their scores and choose to retest independently. Others may need to adjust their postsecondary goals to make them more attainable or add an intermediary step to reach their desired outcome. The key point is that assessment alone is not enough. Students need support to better understand and apply their results in meaningful ways.

All of the work done at the end of the junior year and the beginning of the senior year works best when

aligned with goal-setting processes that already exist at lower grade levels. One such opportunity would be [offering students the PreACT®](#) during their freshman or sophomore year. In addition to providing predictive scores of how a student will likely perform on the ACT, the PreACT provides students with career suggestions based on their goals and interests.

When students establish goals earlier, it is easier for them to make sure they are heading in the right direction.

Accountability and System-Level Impact

Senior retesting with the ACT offers policymakers a valuable way to highlight student growth as part of high school and district accountability. By 2026, 10 states will be using the ACT for federal accountability under ESSA, and several more states incorporate the ACT in their state accountability systems. However, most accountability systems rely on assessment results from students' third year of high school, which don't fully reflect their college readiness. These early assessments miss the progress students make during their senior year. Including senior retest scores as a lagging indicator in an accountability system would give high schools

and districts credit for their continued efforts to prepare students for the world of work and postsecondary education.

Incorporating this metric would motivate schools to encourage students to retest, teachers to continue to move students forward, and students to continue to grow.

One important note is that senior retests are typically optional for students and should remain that way, so they can decide the course of action that is right for them. Some students may be satisfied with their test scores from their state-funded test during junior year. Since all students are required to take an assessment during their junior year, the result from that administration can stand along with students who take the test again and meet established benchmarks. Getting more students to meet expectations during a senior year retest would provide additional benefits to schools and districts within an accountability system. This model may not be allowable for federal accountability under ESSA but would certainly be an option for state-level accountability.

Another advantage of incorporating a senior retest into an accountability system is that some students completely miss testing during their junior year.

“Our post-secondary institutions and ultimately our economy benefit when our high school graduates are able to excel and pursue their passions.”

***—Laurie Hernandez,
Director of Standards & Assessments, Wyoming
Department of Education***

Typically, students who do not obtain a valid score on required assessments negatively impact a school or district in an accountability system. A senior retest would provide schools and districts another opportunity to get all students tested, including those who may have missed the test the year before.

Many accountability systems are missing a growth metric for high schools because federal accountability only requires assessments at one grade level in high school. Growth metrics are best when they can track all students between two given points in time. Some states currently use PreACT® Secure™ or PreACT® 9 Secure to track growth and incorporate a growth metric into accountability systems. Adding senior retesting to an accountability system should not replace any existing growth metrics but rather enhance them or introduce a new metric altogether. An innovative approach could give seniors the option to retest or demonstrate career readiness through an alternative assessment that leads to a work-ready credential, such as ACT® WorkKeys®.

Conclusion

Whether we look at millions of dollars in financial aid or thousands of students avoiding remediation, the data is clear that senior-year school-day ACT retesting programs provide opportunities for educational stakeholders in states and communities that offer retests to seniors. Not only do senior retests result in an additional opportunity for students to demonstrate college and career readiness, but they also provide opportunities for educational leaders and policymakers to signal the importance of growth in the educational system. Additionally, senior retests provide real-world opportunities for students and their families to save money and time during their postsecondary educational journey.

References

Allen, J., & Dingler, C. (2023). *Examining benefits of school-day ACT senior retesting* (ACT Issue Brief R2289). <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R2289-Examining-Benefits-of-School-Day-ACT-Senior-Retesting-11-2023.pdf>

Pickhardt, C. E. (2013). Finishing high school and “senioritis” (academic letdown). *Psychology Today*. Accessed June 24, 2025. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201301/finishing-high-school-and-senioritis-academic-letdown>



ACT is transforming college and career readiness pathways so that everyone can discover and fulfill their potential. Grounded in more than 65 years of research, ACT's learning resources, assessments, research, and work-ready credentials are trusted by students, job seekers, educators, schools, government agencies, and employers in the U.S. and around the world to help people achieve their education and career goals at every stage of life.

Visit us at act.org.

