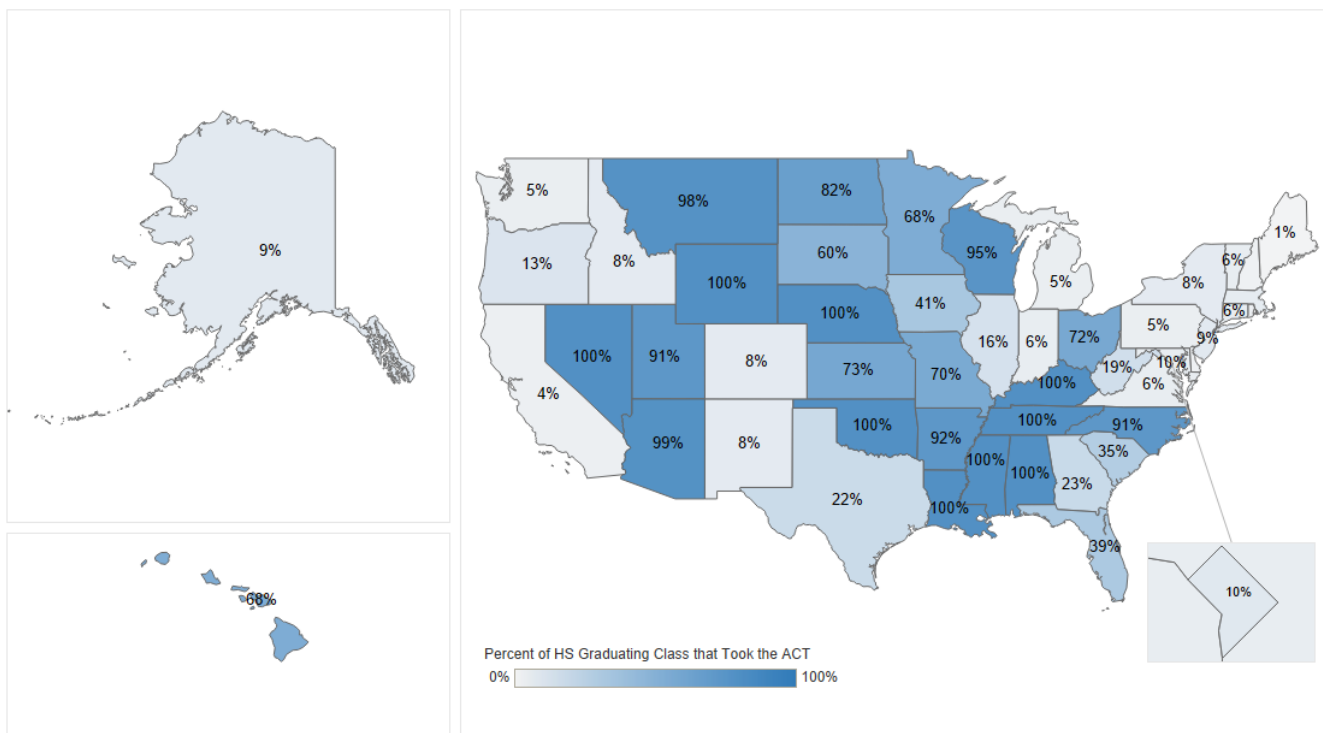


# Interpreting Graduating Class Data

Annual reporting on the ACT-tested graduating class summarizes the college readiness of high school graduates who took the ACT test during high school. Each year, the ACT test is offered nationally on seven weekends in test centers across the country, and it is offered during several school-day testing windows in states and districts that contract with ACT. ACT uses students' testing records from the three most recent academic years — corresponding with most students' sophomore, junior, and senior years of high school — to create each graduating class data set. Although most ACT-tested graduates take the ACT test only once during high school, some students take the test two or more times; ACT uses only the students' most recent test results as part of the graduating class data set.

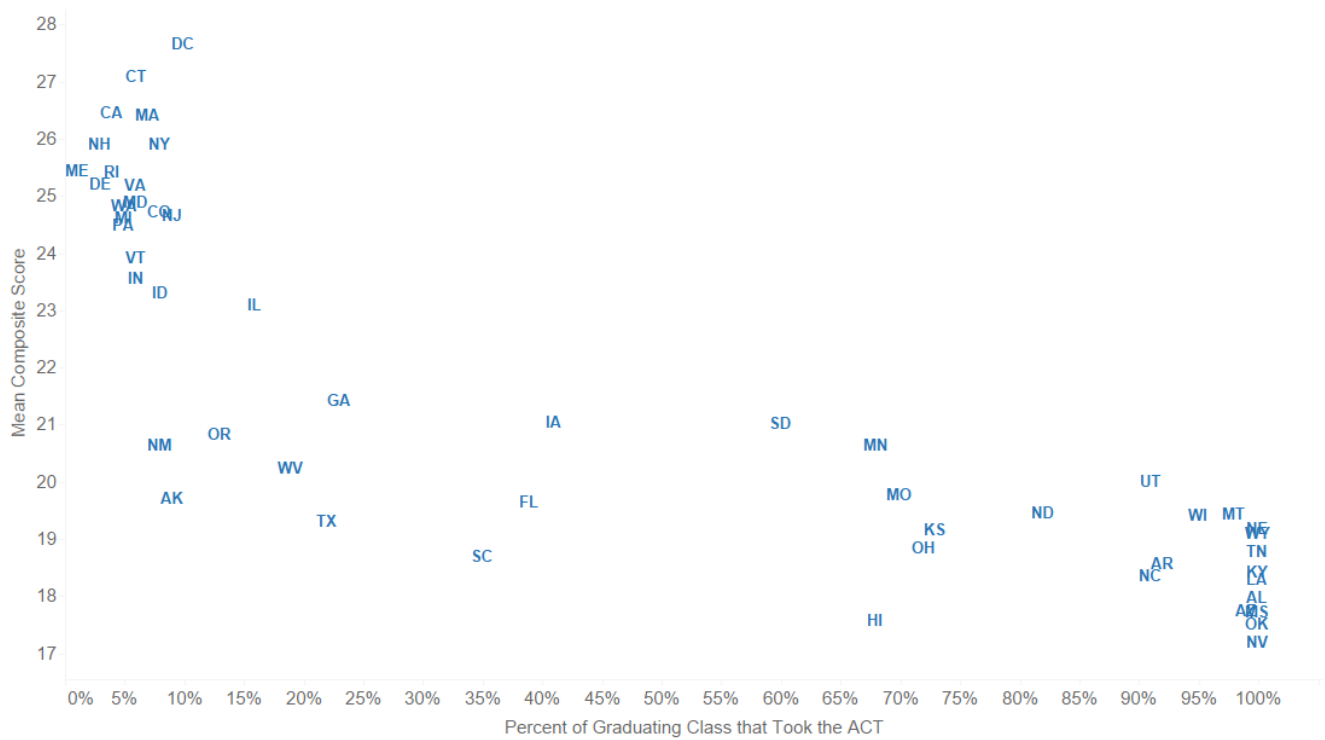
Over 1.3 million students from the high school graduating class of 2025 took the ACT, representing approximately 36% of high school graduates nationwide. The graduating class data set offers a unique perspective on the college readiness of a cohort of high school graduates from around the country and the academic challenges and successes facing high school students today. The ACT-tested graduating class is not a nationally-representative sample of high school graduates, however. Although ACT-tested graduates are estimated to represent up to 100% of all high school graduates in many states or districts in which ACT has a contract to test high school students during the school day, ACT-tested graduates can sometimes represent a much smaller, non-representative share of high school graduates in states where most ACT testing occurs on national (i.e., weekend) test dates. Figure 1 provides the percentage of the 2025 high school graduating class in each state that took the ACT, ranging from a low of 1% in Maine to a high of 100% in several states in which ACT has a contract to test high school students during the school day.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of High School Graduating Class of 2025 that Took the ACT



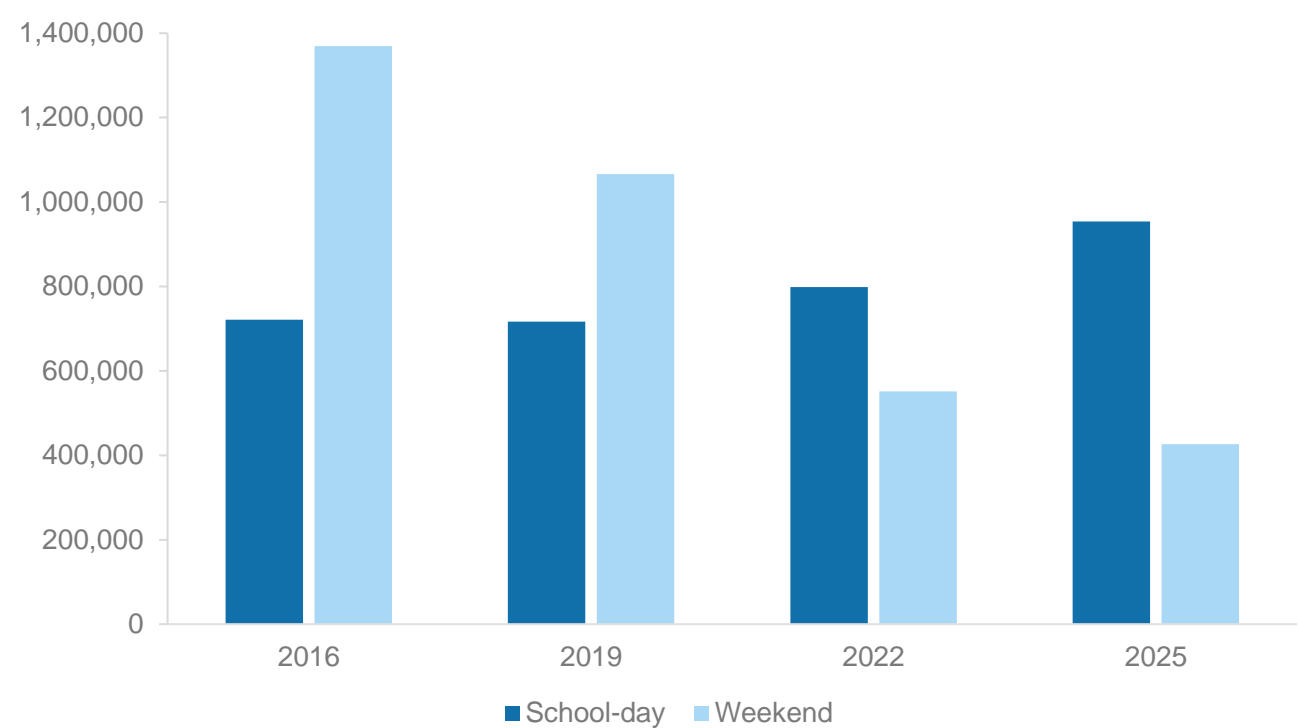
The difference across states in the share of ACT-tested graduates is important context to have when observing differences across states in ACT’s college readiness measures. As Figure 2 shows, there is a negative relationship between the percentage of high school graduates testing in a state and the mean ACT Composite score of the graduates testing in that state. States that have a larger percentage of high school graduates taking the ACT tend to have a lower mean ACT Composite score. ACT’s summary measures of college readiness for these states are likely to be representative of the state’s entire high school graduating class. States that have a smaller percentage of high school graduates taking the ACT tend to have a higher mean ACT Composite score. Since a larger share of these students are taking the ACT on weekend test dates for the purpose of college admissions and scholarship opportunities, ACT’s summary measures of college readiness for these states are not likely to be representative of the state’s entire high school graduating class.

**Figure 2.** 2025 Mean ACT Composite Score by Percentage of High School Graduating Class that Took the ACT



The differences across states in the share of ACT-tested graduates is also important context to have when observing differences over time in the total ACT-tested high school graduating class. Summaries of the college readiness of an entire ACT-tested graduating class — such as the mean ACT Composite score of the class or the share of high school graduates meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks — are simple aggregations of the readiness of ACT-tested students across all states and the District of Columbia. In any given year, the summary provided reflects the unique composition of the ACT-tested graduating class for that year, and that composition has been changing over time due to 1) changes in the states and districts providing the opportunity for all students to take the ACT test during the school day, and 2) external forces such as the decision of many colleges to shift to test optional admissions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the graduating class of 2002, ACT’s graduating class data have represented students who took the ACT test through school-day testing and students who elected to test on one of ACT’s weekend test dates. During the past decade, school-day-tested students have increased both in number and as share of the total ACT-tested high school graduating class, whereas weekend-tested students have decreased both in number and as share of the total ACT-tested high school graduating class (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Number of ACT-Tested High School Graduates by Type of Test Most Recently Taken



On average, high school graduates who participated in school-day testing have performed lower on ACT’s measures of college readiness than graduates who elected to take the ACT through weekend testing (see Table 1). Over time, as school-day-tested students have increased as a share of the total ACT-tested high school graduating class, the mean for the total ACT-tested graduating class has decreased. As seen in Table 1, in 2016, students who most recently tested on a school day represented only 34% of the total ACT-tested graduating class, whereas students who most recently tested on a weekend represented 66% of the graduating class. The weighted sum of the mean ACT Composite scores for these two groups resulted in a total ACT-tested graduating class mean Composite score of 20.8. In 2025, however, students who most recently tested on a school day represented 69% of the total ACT-tested graduating class, whereas students who most recently tested on a weekend represented only 31% of the graduating class. The weighted sum of the mean ACT Composite scores for these two groups resulted in a total ACT-tested graduating class mean Composite score of 19.4.

**Table 1.** Mean ACT Composite Score by Type of Test Most Recently Taken

Grad Class	School-day				Weekend				Total Grad Class
	Mean	x	% of Total Grad Class		Mean	x	% of Total Grad Class		Mean
2016	18.3	x	34%	+	22.1	x	66%	=	20.8
2019	18.1	x	40%	+	22.4	x	60%	=	20.7
2022	17.9	x	59%	+	22.6	x	41%	=	19.8
2025	17.8	x	69%	+	23.0	x	31%	=	19.4