



ACT[®]

The “X Factors”

OF COLLEGE READINESS

Exploring the “X Factors”

High school coursework and good grades play a significant role in student readiness for college, but they certainly aren't the only factors. Other student and school characteristics can affect preparedness including:

- **STUDENT MOTIVATION AND GOALS**
- **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**
- **SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**
- **PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION**
- **ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL MAKEUP OF STUDENT BODY**
- **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)**

Considering all of these “X Factors” can give educators a more holistic approach to preparing students for future success.

In this eBook, we'll explore each “X Factor” and introduce some ACT resources that can help your students get college-ready.



Featured Resource for College Readiness

Recently, there has been increased interest in taking a more holistic approach to evaluating college readiness to better equip students with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to succeed in college. This interest stems from the growing body of research that suggests that other noncognitive characteristics can improve college success predictions beyond those based on academic measures alone.

In *A Multidimensional Perspective of College Readiness*, ACT provides a deeper look at data and evidence that suggests college preparedness goes well beyond learning alone. Download the resource at [**act.org/research**](http://act.org/research).

Source: http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ACT_RR2015-6.pdf

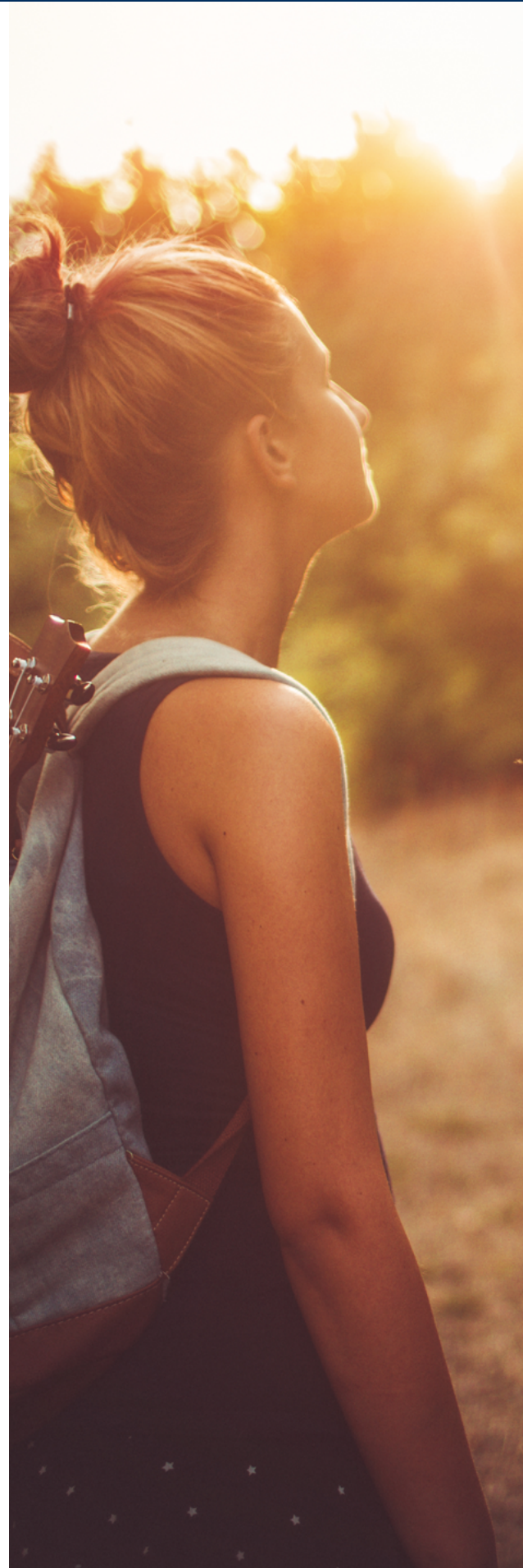


Student Motivation and Goals

In the context of education, motivation includes personal characteristics that help students succeed academically by focusing and maintaining energies on goal-directed activities.

Research shows that **middle school students who have higher motivation scores earn higher grades during high school**. This reinforces the importance of early identification of students with low motivation. Using assessments of Social and Emotional Learning, like ACT® Tessera®, you can measure student motivation (often referred to as tenacity or grit). Once identified, these students may benefit from interventions designed to assist them in developing skills related to motivation, such as:

- **GOAL SETTING**
- **PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION**
- **TIME MANAGEMENT**
- **STUDY SKILLS**



Parent Involvement

Students and teachers aren’t the only ones involved in the college readiness equation. Parents who are involved in their child’s education can be a strong and positive influence on the student’s academic achievement and postsecondary plans. However, unless parents have the information and knowledge they need, it is difficult for them to help their children explore, plan, and make the successful transition from high school to college.

Studies show that parents, particularly those who did not attend college, often do not have the necessary tools, information, and resources to assist their children with college planning. By providing parents with planning resources and timely information, schools are empowering parents and increasing the likelihood that their children will attend college.

**CHECK OUT COLLEGE PLANNING RESOURCES
AT act.org/student.**

Resources include advice on:

- **FINANCIAL AID**
- **COLLEGE APPLICATIONS**
- **COLLEGE VISITS**



Social Engagement

Research has found that middle school students who scored higher on social engagement scales were more likely to participate in two or more extracurricular activities in high school. In turn, students who participate in two or more extracurricular activities during high school have higher college retention rates.

Creating an environment where students can have healthy social engagements pays dividends in the future—in high school, college, and beyond.

Source: <http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Info-Brief-2013-1.pdf>



Perceptions of Education

A students’ perceptions of education—such as college being worth the cost, and completion of a college degree being a priority—are major factors in a student being prepared for college. If a student doesn’t see college as important, or they fear not being able to attend college because of the cost, they might rule out the option altogether.

This is where ACT’s Interest Inventory—which is integrated into multiple ACT solutions—comes in. The tool identifies personal strengths and recommends majors that might be a great fit, which can make the idea of college more real for a student. These career and navigation tools create a platform for counseling and fostering a college-going culture. By going a step further and educating students on the financial aid options available to them, you can help shape and change their perception of education completely.

VISIT my.act.org.



Economic & Cultural Makeup of Student Body

Research shows economically disadvantaged schools have lower perceptions of safety, which is a major factor in school climate.

A school can't change the economics of its community, but by building faculty trust and collaboration, focusing on equity for all students, and involving family and the community, schools can change their climate for the better, therefore creating a college-going culture for all students.

STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS THAT ARE STRONG IN CLIMATE TEND TO BE:

PRESENT NOT ABSENT

Students who go to schools with positive climates have a lower absenteeism.

BETTER BEHAVED

Higher results in safety and relationships are correlated with lower risk of suspensions.

CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Students in higher quality school climates are more respectful and accepting of differences.

ENGAGED

Students in stronger climates feel a greater sense of belonging and can focus on schoolwork with fewer distractions.

ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL

Stronger school climate positively affects student achievement in writing and numeracy.

SOCIALLY & EMOTIONALLY COMPETENT

When students feel safe and connected, they can practice and strengthen collaboration, resilience, and persistence.

Check out our ebook *Improving School Climate: Study Findings & Guidebook* for more information.

Source: <https://pages2.act.org/rs/035-EZR-959/images/School-Climate-Webinar-112918.pdf>



Social and Emotional Learning



A growing number of research studies—including ACT’s own research—have confirmed that SEL skills, sometimes known as behavioral or noncognitive skills, strongly predict academic achievement, career success, and lifelong well-being. In addition, there’s evidence that some SEL skills are easier to strengthen than cognitive ones, and these strengthened skills may last longer. Yet since many students are not assessed on these skills in a reliable and valid way, parents and teachers have little information on which to base interventions that can be used to help students succeed.

ACT is solving this problem with ACT Tessa—a solution that supports student self-knowledge, growth, and continuous improvement. Included with the assessment is a Teacher Playbook filled with activities that can be incorporated into an SEL program.

SEL factors include:

- **CONSCIENTIOUSNESS (GRIT)**
- **AGREEABLENESS (TEAMWORK)**
- **EMOTIONAL STABILITY (RESILIENCE)**
- **OPENNESS (CURIOSITY)**
- **EXTROVERSION (LEADERSHIP)**



Academic Readiness

While the “X Factors” are important, academic performance plays a major role in college readiness. Assessments are key to measuring and remediating academic readiness. These solutions should provide insights that inform intervention, support college and career counseling, and predict future performance.

ACT ASSESSMENTS:

- **ANCHOR** to the well-known and trusted score scale for the ACT® test
- **MEASURE** the 4 core content areas: English, math, reading and science
- **ALIGN** to the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards
- **PREDICT** performance on subsequent assessments

Educators have come to rely on ACT solutions as a means of predicting college success and as a guide to inform curriculum decisions.



Helena Public Schools

In 2014, Helena Public School District in Montana began following the ACT-recommended course patterns. Since then, the district has experienced significant growth in the percentage of students meeting the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks.

SEE THE FULL SUCCESS STORY [HERE](#).

“Before the ACT, different methods to foster student growth and readiness for college were just shots in the dark.”

—Greg Upham, Assistant Superintendent,
Helena Public School District, Montana



Academic Factors + “X Factors” = College Readiness

Current gauges of college and career readiness tend to focus on academic preparation and achievement, but a mounting body of evidence shows that success in college and the workplace is multidimensional.

Academics alone can't prepare students for college. There are many “X Factors” that contribute to holistic preparation, which go even farther beyond what we've covered here.

By paying close attention to the “X Factors” your school can help students become more ready for college, and set them up for a lifetime of success.





www.act.org/k12