

# Benefits of Testing Supports for English Learners Taking the ACT® Test: Evidence From One State

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A recent research report investigated relationships between English language proficiency and the performance of English learners (ELs) taking the ACT® test (Moore et al., 2026). This data byte summarizes the findings about these students' use of testing supports on the ACT. Find additional details in the [full report](#).

ACT began offering testing supports to ELs in the fall of 2017, including (a) extended time (one and one-half time, single day), (b) translated test instructions that ACT provides, and (c) an approved word-to-word bilingual dictionary without definitions. These supports are intended to remove construct-irrelevant variance and allow ELs to more accurately demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

The study sample was from a U.S. state that has been administering the ACT to virtually all Grade 11 students for multiple years and is part of WIDA (<https://wida.wisc.edu/>), a consortium of states led by the University of Wisconsin–Madison. WIDA develops resources for supporting ELs and their teachers, including ACCESS, a set of summative English proficiency assessments administered annually to K–12 students in more than 40 states. The state provided data files that contained demographic information and Grade 11 course transcript data. The state also granted permission for WIDA to share student-level data from the ACCESS English language proficiency assessments with ACT. The data were from the 2018–2019 through 2022–2023 school years and included approximately 10% ELs ( $N = 15,788$  ELs and 143,461 non-ELs). Of these ELs, 3,225 (20%) took the ACT with testing supports.

Figure 1 contains the estimated score gain effects of these testing supports on the performance of the ELs in the study sample, and these effects are based on regression models. The five models predicted each ACT test section score and the ACT Composite score from the following six variables:

1. ACCESS Reading scores
2. indicator of whether students took the ACT test with supports
3. indicator for free or reduced-price lunch eligibility
4. Grade 11 grade point average (GPA; subject-specific for models predicting section test scores and overall for the model predicting the ACT Composite score)
5. number of course credits earned in Grade 11 (subject-specific for models predicting section test scores and total for the model predicting the ACT Composite score)
6. whether the student took any advanced coursework in Grade 11 (college-level, dual-credit, or advanced/honors vs. general, basic/remedial, or unspecified)

The regression model results are in the Appendix, and the full report provides additional details.

**Figure 1.** Estimated Effect of Testing Supports on ACT Performance

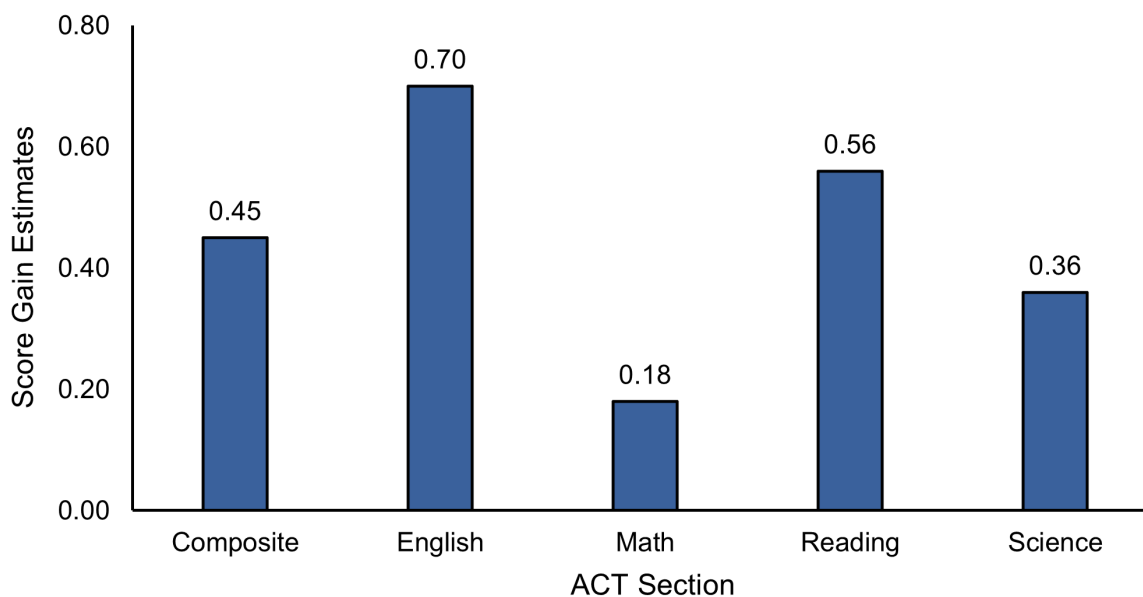


Figure 1 shows that, after we control for all the other variables, testing supports are a positive predictor of ACT performance. This indicates that ELs testing with supports scored higher than similar ELs who tested without supports: ELs who take the ACT with testing supports are expected to earn a Composite score 0.45 score points higher than similar students (i.e., students with similar levels of reading proficiency, similar free or reduced-price lunch eligibility status, and similar GPAs and coursework) who took the ACT without testing supports. Similarly, the ELs who tested with supports would be expected to earn an English score that is 0.70 points higher, a math score 0.18 points higher, a reading score 0.56 points higher, and a science score 0.36 points higher than ELs who tested without supports. While a score gain of one half to three quarters of a point may not seem like a large increase, it could be large enough to help students if that score increase improves their Superscore or makes them eligible for a scholarship, and it may affect a school or district if the score gains move students into a different proficiency category in the state’s accountability system.

We urge educators to take these actions to ensure that these supports are available for their EL students: (a) become familiar with ACT’s policy and process for requesting supports and (b) communicate this information widely at their schools and with students and caregivers. All ELs are eligible for these supports, but our research shows that not all ELs receive the supports. Click these links to find ACT’s [English learner policy](#) and [process for requesting supports](#).

## Reference

Moore, J. L., Schnieders, J. Z., Li, D., & Qiu, C. (2026). *Exploring relationships between English proficiency and ACT performance of English learners: State 2*. ACT.

<https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R2539-English-proficiency-ACT-test-performance-ELs-State-2-2026-04.pdf>

## Appendix

**Table A1.** Results of Regression Analyses Predicting ACT Scores

Variable	Composite		English		Math		Reading		Science	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Intercept	2.95***	0.18	-0.75*	0.28	8.16***	0.22	0.56 <sup>ns</sup>	0.30	5.20***	0.33
ACCESS Reading score	0.02***	0.00	0.03***	0.00	0.01***	0.00	0.03***	0.00	0.02***	0.00
EL with supports	0.45***	0.04	0.70***	0.06	0.18***	0.04	0.56***	0.06	0.36***	0.06
Free/reduced-price lunch	-0.17***	0.03	-0.21***	0.05	-0.21***	0.04	-0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.06	-0.19**	0.06
Grade 11 GPA <sup>†</sup>	0.46***	0.03	0.31***	0.03	0.28***	0.02	0.24***	0.03	0.31***	0.03
Number of credits earned <sup>†</sup>	0.04***	0.01	-0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	0.05	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	0.05	0.25***	0.05	0.14 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09
Advanced coursework	0.33***	0.03	0.51	0.05	0.40***	0.04	0.31***	0.05	0.29***	0.06
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.26		0.19		0.11		0.16		0.10	

*Note.* \*\*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.0001$ ; \*\* indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.001$ ; \* indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.01$ ; <sup>ns</sup> indicates not significant.

<sup>†</sup> Grade 11 GPA and number of credits earned are subject specific for models predicting section test scores; overall Grade 11 GPA and total number of credits earned were used for the model predicting the ACT Composite score.



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