The Forgotten Middle
(Updated Version of Report Published in 2008)

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Question

What’s the number of American high school students who drop out of school, every day bored, frustrated, or so far behind that they’ve given up?

6,000
Question
What’s the number of students that remain in school each year, assuming that they are on target to graduate from high school ready for college and career when indeed they are not?

More than 1 Million
The US once led the world in high school graduation rates. Where do we rank now?

16th
Every student should be prepared to a standard of readiness for postsecondary education and work.
About ACT

ACT is a nonprofit organization driven by our mission, our vision, and our values.

- **Our mission**—Helping people achieve education and workplace success
- **Our vision**—To impact lifelong success for individuals as they define it
- **Our values**—Excellence, diversity, leadership, empowerment, learning, and sustainability
Defining College and Career Readiness: ACT’s definition

The acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll in and succeed in credit-bearing first-year courses at a postsecondary institution (such as a two- or four-year college, trade school, or technical school) without the need for remediation.
College Readiness Benchmarks

How Does ACT Determine if Students Are College Ready?

The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. Based on a nationally stratified sample, the Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and represent a typical set of expectations. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>College Course</th>
<th>ACT Explore</th>
<th>ACT Plan</th>
<th>The ACT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>9th Grade</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>College Algebra</td>
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<td>Biology</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
College and Career Readiness System

Longitudinal Assessments

**EXPLORE**
8th–9th Grade
Score Scale: 1—25

**PLAN**
10th Grade
Score Scale: 1—32

**ACT**
11th–12th Grade
Score Scale: 1—36

Characteristics of all three assessments
- English, math, reading, science, *optional* Writing Test (ACT only)
- Career and Educational Components
- Needs Assessment
- Plans and Background Information
- Interest Inventory
- High School Course Grades Information
- EOS

Instruction

**QualityCore**
9th–12th Grade
Instructional Improvement

- Educator’s Guide
- Course Objectives
- Instructional Units
- End-of-Course Assessments
- Formative Item Pools
Background – *A Nation at Risk* (1983)

**Recommendations:**

- All students have access to core curriculum

- Core should provide foundation for life after high school
College readiness by the numbers

1.8 million ACT® test takers—more than any other college admissions assessment

57% of the 2014 high school grad class

86% of 2014 ACT-tested graduates aspire to postsecondary education

31% met zero ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

16% met only one ACT College Readiness Benchmark

14% met just two ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

13% met exactly three ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

26% met all four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

37% met ACT Science Benchmark

43% met ACT Math Benchmark

44% met ACT Reading Benchmark

64% met ACT English Benchmark

ACT improveyourself.org
The Forgotten Middle
Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School
“...the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school”

--The Forgotten Middle(2008), p.2
So, what has changed since the 2008 study?
Purposes of Study

1. To examine the factors that have the greatest impact on improving student college and career readiness
2. To examine the trajectory of growth towards college and career readiness from 8th – 12th grades
3. To examine the influence of academically related student behaviors on college and career readiness
Factors to shoot for:

• Maintaining a B average
• Earning higher grades
• Taking a core curriculum
• Taking additional standard courses
• Taking advanced courses
• Meeting the EXPLORE College Readiness Benchmarks
• Increasing EXPLORE scores in each subject area in 8th grade
Increases in ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment Associated with Various Academic Interventions - Math

- Maintain B average in standard mathematics and science courses: 3
- Increase standard mathematics & science course grades 1 letter: 8
- Take core curriculum in mathematics & science: 1
- Take additional standard mathematics & science courses: 7
- Meet all four EXPLORE Benchmarks: 8
- Increase all four EXPLORE scores 2 points: 12
Increases in ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment Associated with Various Academic Interventions - Reading

- Maintain B average in standard English & social studies courses: 1
- Increase standard English & social studies course grades 1 letter: 4
- Take core curriculum in English & social studies: 0
- Take additional standard English & social studies courses: 0
- Meet all four EXPLORE Benchmarks: 12
- Increase all four EXPLORE scores 2 points: 15

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Perhaps better schools/teachers are the answer
The extent of the problem

This graph is taken from Dougherty and Fleming, Research Report 2012-9, Getting Students on Track to College and Career Readiness: How Many Catch Up from Far Behind?
Percent of Students Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks by Subject, 2012

- English: 65% (EXPLORE), 67% (ACT)
- Reading: 45% (EXPLORE), 52% (ACT)
- Math: 32% (EXPLORE), 46% (ACT)
- Science: 16% (EXPLORE), 31% (ACT)
Percent of Students Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks by Number of Benchmarks Met, 2012

EXPLORE
ACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Met Zero</th>
<th>Met One</th>
<th>Met Two</th>
<th>Met Three</th>
<th>Met Four</th>
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<td>12</td>
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There has been some progress since 2008

Percent of Explore-Tested Eighth Graders Meeting Explore Benchmarks, 2008-2012
The reality of meeting the College and Career Readiness Benchmarks

Meeting all 4 benchmarks compared to none will:

– Increase college enrollments by 21%
– Increase college retention by 16-17%, depending on the type of institution attended
– Increase college graduation (bachelors’ degree) by 26%

Data comes from Radunzel and Noble, 2012 Tracking 2003 ACT tested Graduates: College Readiness, Enrollment and Long-Term Success
Conclusions

✓ This situation is essentially unchanged from the original report in 2008
✓ Catching up is difficult.
✓ Middle schools need to prepare more students to profit from high school.
✓ K-8 standards must focus on the knowledge and skills that are essential for students to know and these standards must be nonnegotiable for all students.
✓ The focus of the discussion must change: The transition to high school is as important as the transition to college.
1) The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School

2) Catching Up to College and Career Readiness: The Challenge is Greater for At-Risk Students - How many “far off track” eighth graders from disadvantaged student demographic groups catch up to college and career readiness before they graduate? How many “far off track” disadvantaged fourth graders catch up by eighth grade?

3) Building Momentum: The Condition of Progress Toward College Readiness - This report provides a look at the progress toward college readiness made by middle school students and students at the midpoint of high school who took ACT Explore® and ACT Plan® during the 2011–12 school year.

4) Condition of College and Career Readiness - Is ACT’s annual report on the college readiness of the most recent high school graduation class.