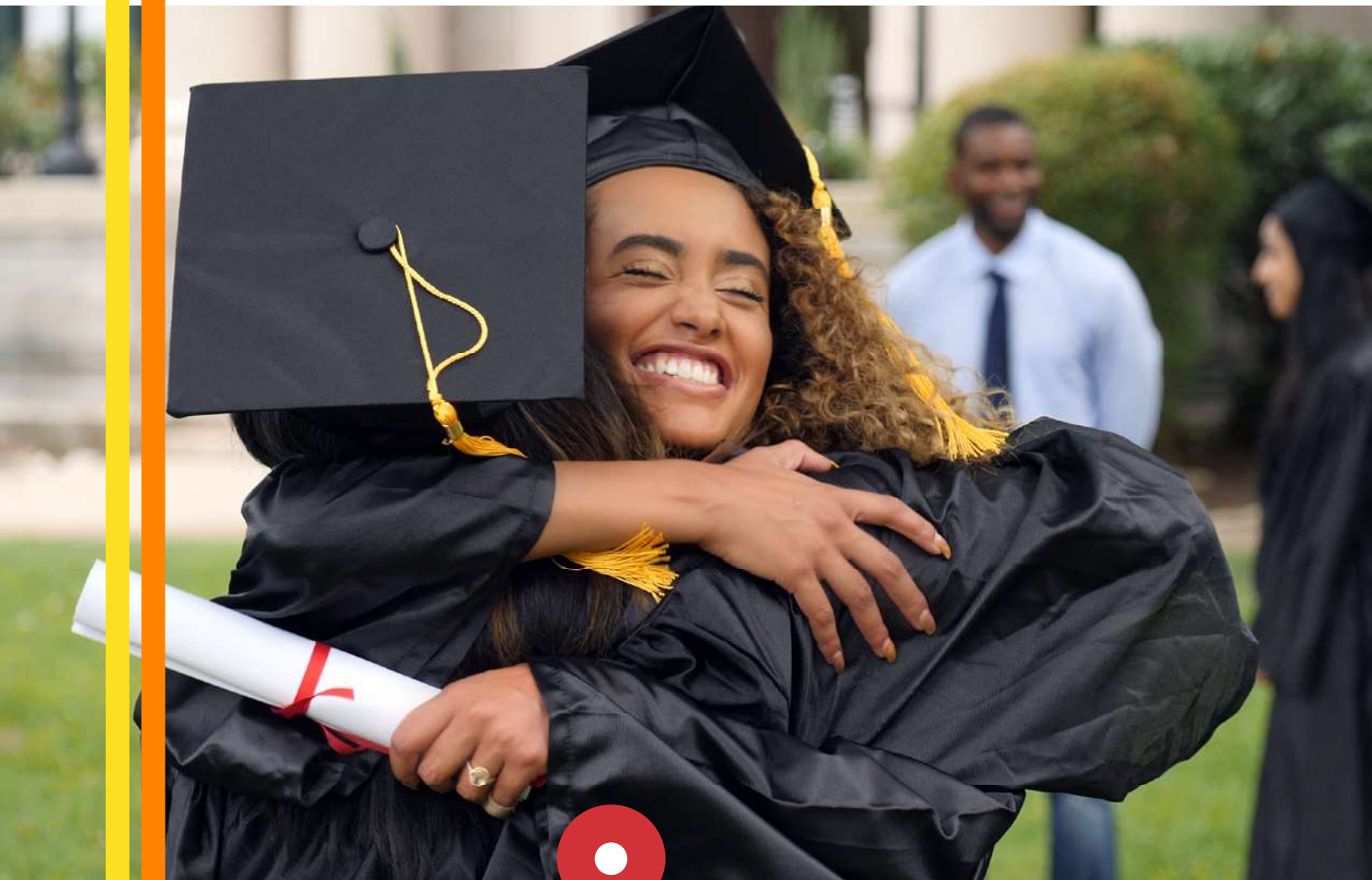


# STATE SUCCESS STORIES



act.org





## MESSAGE

### A Message from Catherine Hofmann, Senior Vice President of Government and Public Relations



Empowering students and educators to navigate the path from career readiness to workforce success is central to ACT's mission. Between 2024 and 2026, our partnership with 34 states has marked a significant step forward in shaping the future of education and workforce development. Reaching over one million students through statewide assessments, these collaborations help prepare learners for academic achievement and success in a rapidly evolving job market. Reaching over two million students through statewide assessments, these collaborations focus on preparing young learners for academic success and a competitive and evolving job market.

Through tools like ACT WorkKeys and the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), states are equipping learners with essential, job-ready skills backed by recognized credentials. These assessments go beyond academic achievement to help students build a solid foundation for future success, opening doors to college credit, workforce advancement, and lifelong learning.

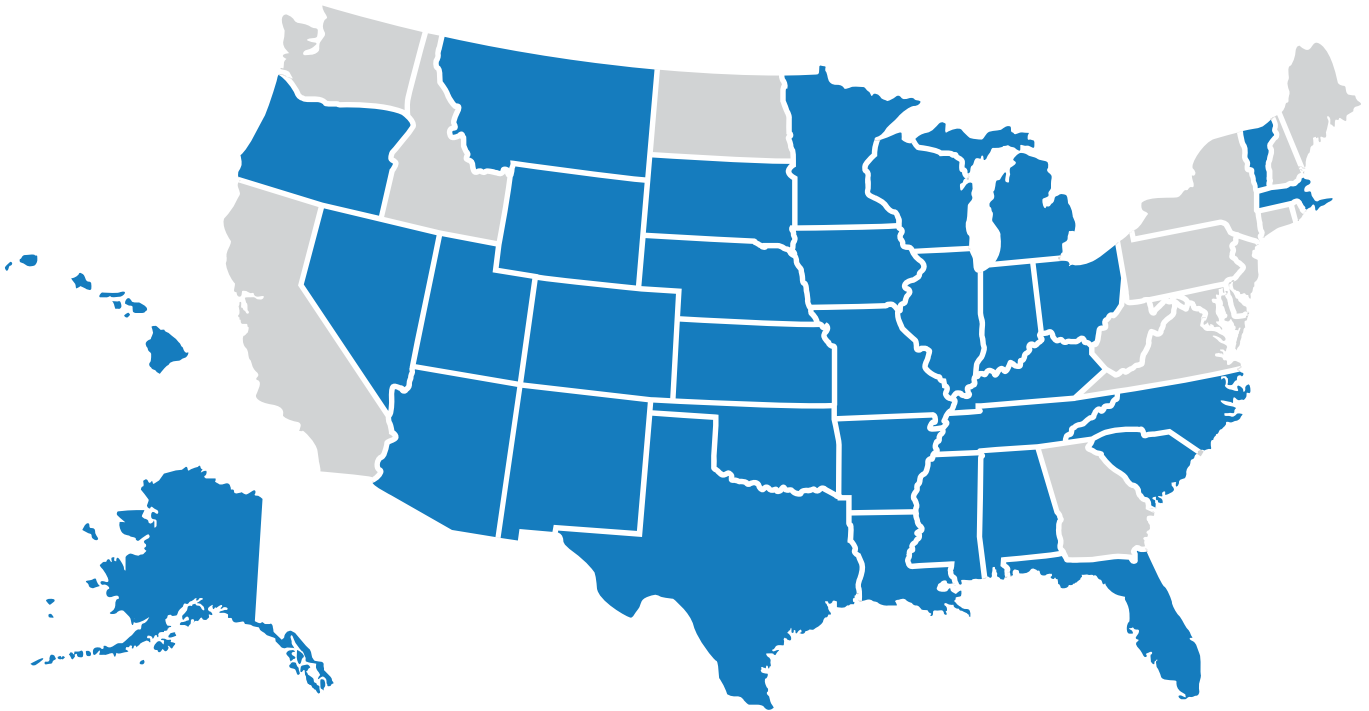
States like Alabama, Kansas, and Wisconsin demonstrate the power of ACT's longitudinal growth tools to drive continuous improvement. Other standout policies, like Vermont's use of WorkKeys for teacher licensure and Tennessee's senior retake initiative, highlight innovative applications that maximize impact. With ACT assessments integrated into ESSA-aligned accountability systems, states are effectively advancing college and career readiness, equity, and access at scale.

The case studies in this collection showcase how state partnerships with ACT are transforming education, supporting underserved communities, and creating clearer pathways to success for students, educators, and employers alike. Together, these initiatives represent a nationwide commitment to fostering growth, breaking down educational boundaries, and ensuring every learner has the tools to thrive.

→ **Catherine Hofmann**

*Sr. Vice President State and Federal Policy*

The states highlighted below have a contract with ACT for at least one of the following: ACT, PreACT, ACT WorkKeys, ACT WorkKeys Curriculum, ACT Online Prep.



For more information about ACT's state testing programs, email the ACT State and Federal Policy Team at [policy@act.org](mailto:policy@act.org).

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# Career Readiness and Navigation



Career readiness and navigation are crucial for individuals to successfully enter and advance within the workforce. They equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of the job market, adapt to new challenges, and achieve their career goals.

ACT® WorkKeys® is a nationally recognized system of assessments, curriculum, and job profiling that helps states, students, and employers measure essential workplace skills linked to career readiness. Students who complete the three core WorkKeys assessments—*Applied Math*, *Workplace Documents*, and *Graphic Literacy*—receive the ACT® National Career Readiness Certificate™ (NCRC™), a portable credential with four levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

The American Council on Education (ACE) recommends that NCRC earners receive college credits as follows:

- ▶ Students achieving Platinum NCRC can now earn 9 semester hours (3 each in *Quantitative Reasoning*, *Information Literacy*, and *Professional Writing*)
- ▶ Gold earners can receive 6 semester hours, and Silver earners can be awarded 3 semester hours in the vocational category.







Individual communities may acquire a certification as an ACT® Work Ready™ Community (WRC). This initiative empowers states, states, regions, and counties with data, processes, and tools that drive economic growth. Participants leverage the NCRC to measure and close the skills gap and build common frameworks that link, align, and match their workforce development efforts. Participation demonstrates to businesses that the community is committed to providing a skilled workforce and can attract new businesses.

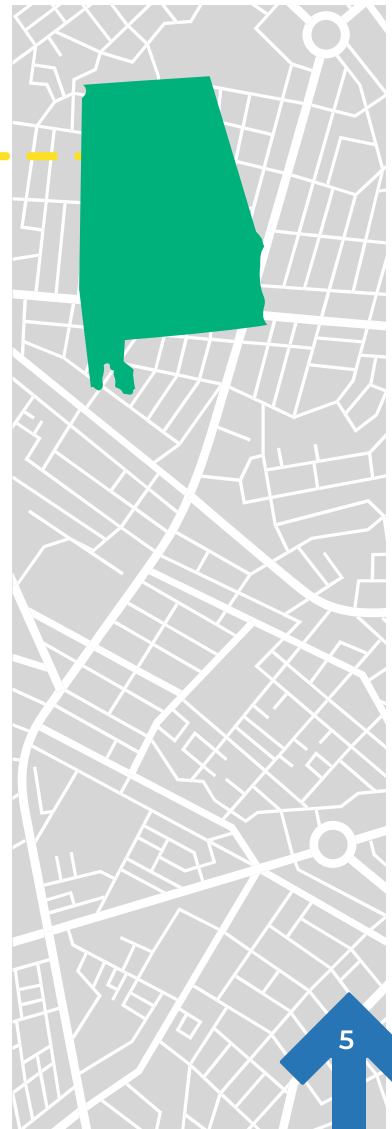
## STATE SUCCESS STORIES

### Alabama

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) supports college and career readiness by offering the WorkKeys assessments to all 12th-grade students each fall; the assessment is available in both paper and online formats.

Students who do not initially achieve a Silver-level NCRC are offered a retest opportunity in the spring. They are provided access to the ACT® WorkKeys® Curriculum to help strengthen their skills before the second administration.

Alabama's strategic plan sets a goal for 65% of each graduating cohort to earn a Silver-level NCRC. The state is making strong progress toward that target, reaching **62%** as of 2023.





## Arkansas

The Arkansas Department of Education offers the WorkKeys assessments to all 12th-grade students as part of its commitment to strengthening college and career readiness. Since WorkKeys must be offered to students before they graduate, students may take WorkKeys as early as 10th grade.

To support student success, the state also provides access to the ACT WorkKeys Curriculum. This allows students to build and improve their career readiness skills before or after taking the WorkKeys assessment.

Over the past several years, participation in WorkKeys has steadily increased across Arkansas. Beginning in the 2025–2026 academic year, earning a WorkKeys certification will serve as one of the alternative pathways to high school graduation, further expanding opportunities for students to demonstrate workforce readiness and achieve postsecondary success.

## Kansas

The Kansas Department of Education offers the WorkKeys assessments each fall to all 11th-grade students, available in both online and paper formats.

The state has integrated WorkKeys results and career benchmark data into its Individual Plan of Study (IPS) program. This helps students understand their career readiness and explore pathways prior to graduation.

Fall 2024 marked the eighth statewide administration of ACT WorkKeys testing in Kansas. In the 2022–2023 academic year, the state saw a 15% increase in students testing online compared to the previous year, aided by new enhancements such as pre-recorded audio delivery via URL.

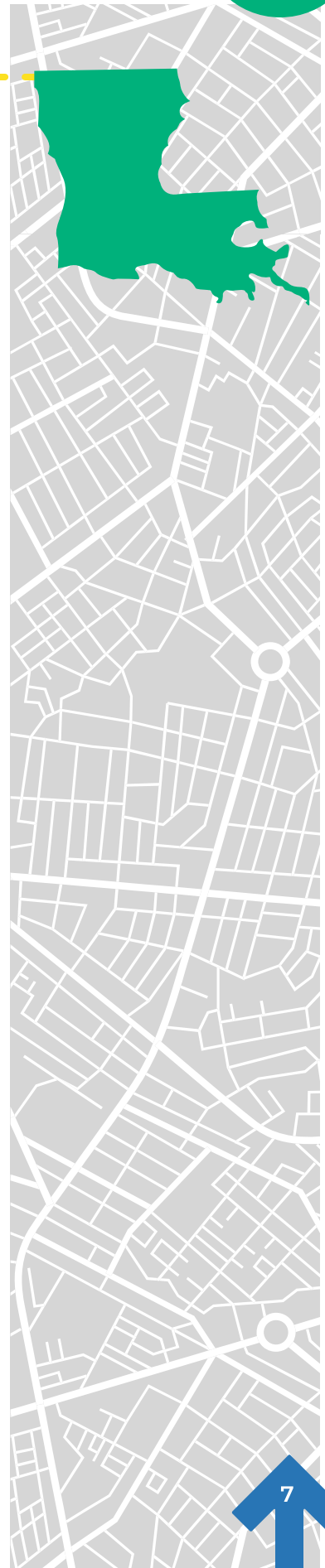


## Louisiana

Louisiana pays for the first test of each of the three NCRC tests for students on a career graduation pathway. Additionally, schools and districts may choose to offer WorkKeys to their juniors and/or seniors. Over the past five years, participation has grown significantly, with more than 13,000 students completing the assessments.

ACT WorkKeys is also integrated into Louisiana's school accountability system, allowing schools to earn additional points on their school report cards for students who achieve a Gold-level NCRC or higher. Over 53% of testers in Louisiana earn at least a Silver certificate each year. This approach underscores Louisiana's commitment to recognizing and rewarding career readiness as a key component of student success.

Finally, not only does Louisiana test a high number of students with WorkKeys, but the state also ensures a high number of people earn certificates that support their communities in becoming Work Ready. Louisiana is one of the leaders in the country in participating in [Work Ready Communities](#). Of its 64 parishes, 35 participate in the Work Ready Communities initiative.





## Vermont

Vermont is leading the way with innovative uses of ACT WorkKeys, expanding both career and educational opportunities for its students. The Vermont Department of Education requires all 11th- and 12th-grade Career and Technical Education (CTE) students to take the *WorkKeys Applied Mathematics* and *Workplace Documents* assessments in 11th grade; students scoring a level 5 or higher may then complete the *Graphic Literacy* assessment. Students who earn a level 5 or higher across all three assessments receive the NCRC, which Vermont recognizes as a postsecondary credential for Perkins V accountability purposes.

Students in a CTE program take the two WorkKeys assessments; in the 2023–2024 school year, 89% of CTE students had taken the assessments. WorkKeys has become a meaningful part of Vermont's CTE culture, offering teachers valuable insights into student readiness and providing students with credentials that matter.

Vermont's innovation extends beyond secondary education: The Community College of Vermont (CCV) accepts CTE students' WorkKeys scores for eligibility into Fast Forward and Dual Enrollment programs and awards two elective credits to matriculated students who earn a level 5 NCRC or higher.

*“Vermont first required all of its regional CTE centers to administer WorkKeys assessments beginning in the 2020–2021 school year. We phased in our requirements for the percentage of students to be tested. In the first year, 56% of our CTE program concentrators took the WorkKeys Workplace Documents and Applied Mathematics assessments. That increased to 86% in the 2021–2022 school year, and then to 97% in 2022–2023 and 98% in 2023–2024.”*

➔ Ruth Durkee, Vermont AOE State Director of Career Technical Education





In a groundbreaking move, as of March 2025, the Vermont State Board of Professional Educators approved the use of WorkKeys NCRC scores as an alternative to Praxis exams for teacher certification. Any aspiring teacher in Vermont—particularly those transitioning from the workforce into teaching—can now qualify for licensure by achieving a Gold-level NCRC (level 5 or higher in *Applied Mathematics*, *Graphic Literacy*, and *Workplace Documents*). Vermont is the first state to approve the NCRC for full teacher certification, reflecting the state's bold commitment to career readiness pathways across education and the workforce.



# Accountability and School Improvement



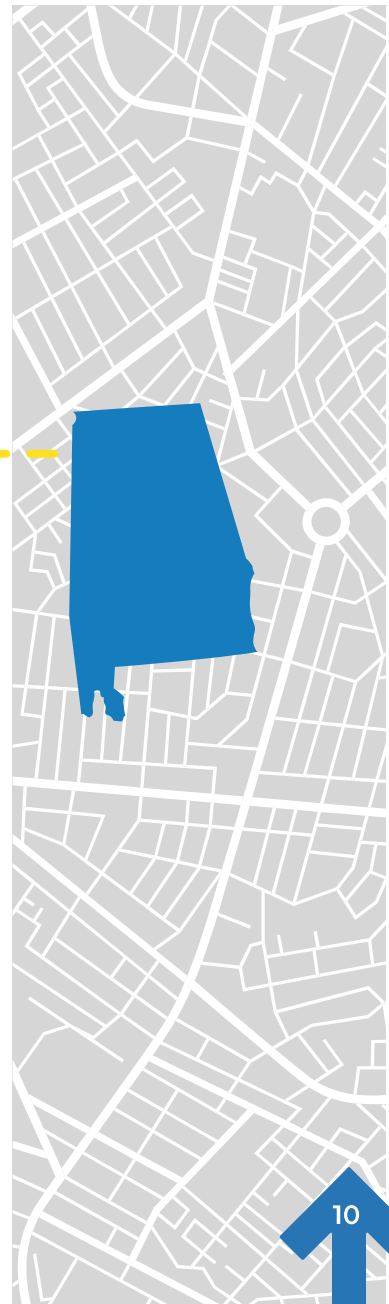
Robust school accountability promotes transparency by providing parents, policymakers, and the public with clear data on school performance, enabling informed decision-making and targeted improvement.

The ACT is the only nationally recognized college readiness exam that has fully met federal technical requirements for state assessments. For this reason, states confidently use it to measure English language arts, mathematics, and science achievement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

## STATE SUCCESS STORIES

### Alabama

Alabama has been a pioneer in using the ACT for federal accountability, becoming one of the first states to adopt the assessment for this purpose. Since the 2014–2015 academic year, the Alabama State Department of Education has partnered with ACT to provide all 11th-grade students—approximately 47,000 each year—with the opportunity to take the ACT as part of the state's ESSA accountability system. Alabama also administers the PreACT to every 10th-grade student, and the test serves as part of a growth measure within its state accountability system, specifically to track academic progress from 10th to 11th grade.





This long-standing collaboration between ACT and the state reflects Alabama's commitment to access college and career readiness measures for all students. The partnership underscores the state's leadership in using high-quality assessments to inform instruction and support postsecondary opportunities.

*“Since 2014, Alabama has ensured that every student has the opportunity to take the ACT. We celebrate the strides we've made in reducing barriers to testing, which has helped open doors for countless students to either pursue postsecondary education or enter the workforce—whatever path they feel is right for them. Although we've made progress, we're committed to addressing the remaining challenges and ensuring every student has the opportunity to get a holistic view of their college and career readiness.”*

→ Dr. Eric Mackey, State Superintendent, Alabama State Department of Education

## Arizona

Arizona's implementation of the ACT for ESSA is a case study of how to design a statewide policy with a laser-like focus on data. ACT and Arizona have been in partnership since Arizona began administering the ACT to every 11th grader in 2022. Arizona's partnership with ACT extends beyond assessments: the state uses its ACT data to identify specific standards or demographics and frequently partners with ACT for targeted research. They use the research results to improve education and classroom practices.

Arizona is also looking at offering schools ACT Online Prep (AOP) to support increasing post secondary readiness scores. In 2022, Arizona expanded college and career readiness opportunities by implementing school-day ACT testing statewide. By offering the ACT during the regular school day at no cost to students, Arizona has removed traditional barriers to participation, such as transportation challenges, scheduling conflicts, and access to testing materials.



## Arkansas

Since the spring of 2015, Arkansas has provided all high school juniors—approximately 31,000 students annually—with the ACT as part of its ESSA accountability system. The assessment is a key component of the state’s “School Quality and Student Success” indicator, measuring college and career readiness for every 11th grader. Students complete the English, reading, math, and science subject tests using both online and paper-based formats.

ACT data helps Arkansas educators identify academic strengths and areas for improvement, supports schools in aligning instruction with postsecondary expectations, and informs state efforts to close achievement gaps. Additionally, ACT’s research team supports Arkansas’s strategic work by generating special reports that inform high schools about how well their students do in college. This statewide approach reflects Arkansas’s commitment to using actionable data to drive continuous improvement and expand opportunities for all students.

## Louisiana

Louisiana has incorporated both the ACT and WorkKeys assessments into its accountability model to measure college and career readiness. School districts earn credit for the college or career readiness indicator when students score at least a 20 on the ACT or achieve a Gold-level on WorkKeys, reinforcing Louisiana’s commitment to multiple pathways for postsecondary success. Since implementing school-day ACT testing in 2013, Louisiana has significantly expanded access by offering the ACT at no cost during the regular school day. This model removes critical barriers—such as transportation





challenges, scheduling conflicts, and testing material access—that can prevent students from earning a college-reportable score. Through these efforts, Louisiana not only strengthens its accountability system but also increases opportunities for college admissions, scholarships, and career readiness.

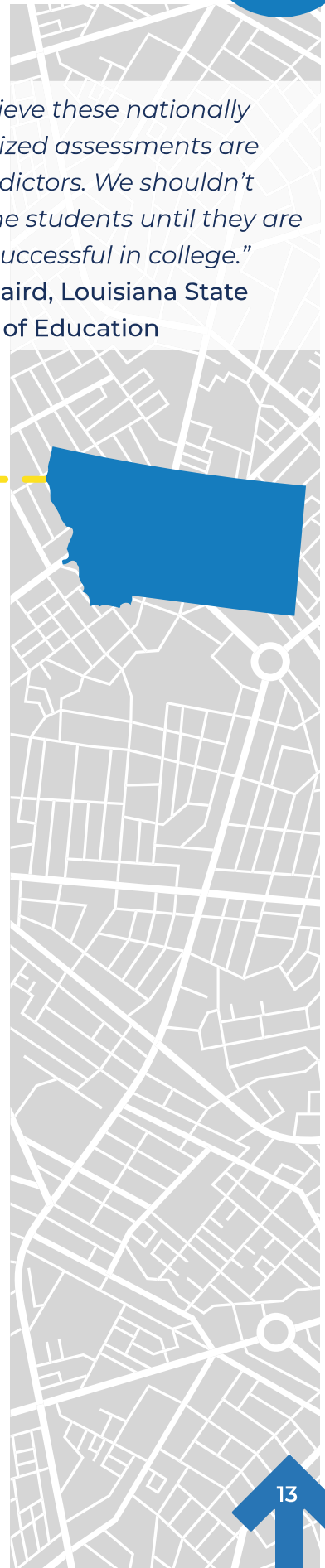
*“We believe these nationally recognized assessments are excellent predictors. We shouldn’t accelerate the students until they are ready to be successful in college.”*

→ Jennifer Baird, Louisiana State Department of Education

## Montana

Montana students have consistently demonstrated strong academic performance, earning an average composite ACT score of 24.

The ACT is fully integrated into Montana’s ESSA accountability system, with all 11th-grade students participating each year. The state has achieved a “fully meets” rating in the U.S. Department of Education’s assessment peer review process—meaning the state has demonstrated that the ACT meets all applicable federal requirements for accountability assessment. Since implementing school-day ACT testing in the 2013–2014 academic year, the state has worked to remove barriers that can prevent students from accessing college-reportable scores, such as transportation challenges, scheduling conflicts, and lack of testing materials. By offering the ACT during the school day at no cost, Montana ensures that students across all communities—including rural areas—have access to demonstrate college readiness and pursue postsecondary opportunities.





## Nebraska

Students in Nebraska are considered “meets expectations” if they score at least an 18 on the ACT mathematics or English sections and at least a 19 on the science section. Students who meet or exceed this benchmark are assumed ready to succeed in a credit-bearing first-year course at an institution of higher education.

Additionally, ACT is working with Nebraska on a research project using the ACT Rigor Index, a tool that will analyze transcript data to compare grades and ACT scores. This research, examining ELA, math, and science courses, would enable ACT to provide information to Nebraska about the relative rigor of their high school courses. ACT’s research team also partnered with Nebraska to review learning loss following a devastating natural disaster (flooding) in 2019 and to conduct a review of learning loss after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Texas

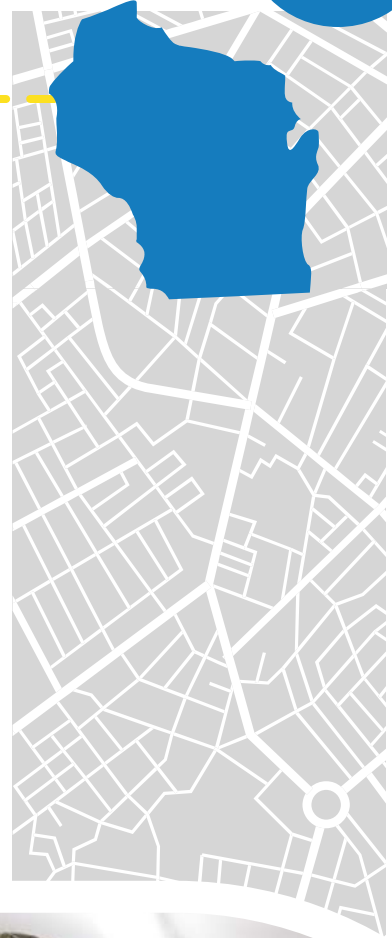
In Texas, ACT scores are one way students can demonstrate college readiness and become eligible to enroll in dual credit courses (courses that count for both high school and college credit). Specifically, if a student scores at least a 23 Composite and a minimum of 19 on the English and/or math sections of the ACT, they are considered to have met the college readiness standards under the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) in the respective subject area(s).

Being TSI-exempt allows students to enroll directly into dual credit courses without having to take additional placement tests like the TSI Assessment. Texas’s use of ACT scores as one of the approved pathways for students to qualify for dual credit opportunities gives students an early jumpstart on earning college credits.



## Wisconsin

Since the 2014–2015 academic year, Wisconsin has administered the ACT with writing to approximately 63,000 11th-grade students each year as part of its ESSA accountability system. In 2023, the state earned the distinction of “fully meeting” the U.S. Department of Education’s peer review requirements for the ACT in all three assessed areas—mathematics, English, and science. This recognition reflects Wisconsin’s commitment to rigorous, high-quality assessments that provide meaningful insights into student achievement. By using the ACT statewide, Wisconsin ensures equitable access to a college readiness measure that supports both accountability and postsecondary planning.



# Measuring Growth



Measuring academic growth can provide better insights than achievement alone. Solutions that measure growth will provide a holistic view of learners and will be grounded in validity, reliability, and fairness, supporting actionable insights. ACT's growth model is derived from the well-known Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) methodology using the national sample of test-takers.

ACT's ability to calculate growth across our suite of assessments represents an opportunity to demonstrate the additional value value of using PreACT® in states and districts that already use the ACT.

Additionally, allowing high school seniors the option of retaking the ACT offers them another opportunity to demonstrate college and career readiness.

Incorporating ACT Online Prep™ (AOP) is another way states have expanded opportunities for students to get ready for assessments and perform successfully.







## STATE SUCCESS STORIES

### Alabama

Alabama's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in its use of both PreACT® Secure™ for 10th graders and the ACT for 11th graders, with growth between the two assessments serving as a key measure in the state's accountability system.

Since 2015, ACT has provided detailed school- and district-level growth reports, enabling educators to analyze academic progress across content areas and student groups. These reports help Alabama schools compare their growth to state averages, evaluate the impact of curricular changes, and identify subject-specific strengths and areas for improvement.

In 2023–2024, 53,927 students in Alabama tested with PreACT Secure. By aligning assessments across grades 10 and 11, Alabama ensures a consistent, standards-based approach to measuring and supporting student learning over time. This long-standing partnership underscores the state's data-driven focus on readiness.

### Kansas

Kansas has made student growth a central priority in its approach to college and career readiness. By offering the PreACT® 8/9 statewide to all 9th-grade students, Kansas provides early, meaningful benchmarks that districts can use to demonstrate academic growth.

Assessing students early allows educators to measure progress over time, identify areas for targeted support, and adjust instruction to meet student needs. In the 2024–2025 school year, Kansas administered more than 37,000 PreACT assessments, underscoring the state's strong commitment to using data-driven insights to support continuous academic improvement.



## Nebraska

Nebraska supports the use of the ACT as the state high school test by providing school districts with the flexibility to choose between PreACT and ACT Online Prep (AOP), offering students valuable college readiness tools.

Districts may administer these assessments in either the fall of grades 10 or 11 or in the spring of grade 10, depending on local needs. AOP allows students to complete writing tasks and quizzes with immediate feedback, supporting personalized learning and preparation. PreACT, in particular, is widely used by educators to guide instruction and help students explore academic goals and postsecondary pathways.

This flexible, student-centered approach empowers Nebraska schools to align assessment timing and tools with their instructional strategies.

## Oklahoma

Since 2016, approximately 37,000 Oklahoma seniors have taken the ACT each year as part of the state's graduation requirements, making the ACT a cornerstone of the state's college and career readiness efforts. Many students also take PreACT in 10th grade, and a federal GEAR UP grant has helped expand access and support.

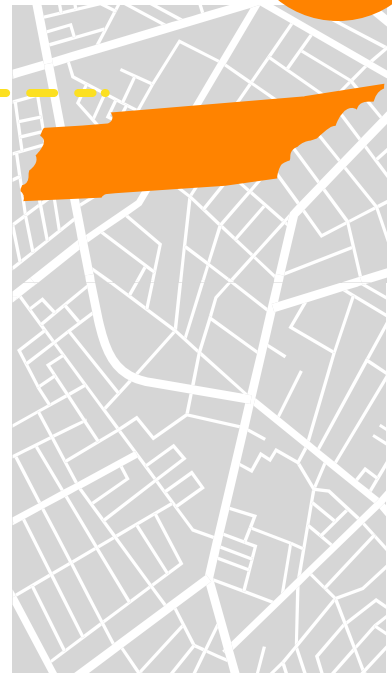
Due to the program's success, beginning in the 2025–2026 academic year, districts will begin contracting directly with ACT to continue this work. Thirteen districts are leading the way by offering a comprehensive pathway—administering PreACT 8/9, ACT in grade 10, and using AOP across grades 8–11.

Oklahoma also invests in educator training to ensure PreACT data is used effectively to guide instruction and support student growth.



## Tennessee

Tennessee has been a national leader in expanding access to college readiness opportunities through the ACT. In 2016, it became the first state to offer a statewide ACT senior retake, following recommendations from a 2015 task force convened by the state commissioner of education to explore strategies for improving ACT scores. Since 2017, the Tennessee Department of Education has provided public high school seniors with the opportunity to retake the ACT at no cost during the school day, in addition to offering all juniors a school-day ACT administration.



**The impact has been substantial:** Scores from the 2018 senior retake saved Tennessee students up to \$11.4 million in remedial course costs. In 2023, seniors who participated in the retake saw an average composite score increase of 2.09 points, with 77% of students improving their superscore. Students with disabilities experienced an average superscore gain of 2.35 points, highlighting the program's role in promoting improved outcomes. This forward-thinking policy reflects Tennessee's strong commitment to increasing access, supporting academic growth, and opening doors to postsecondary success.

*"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 that Tennessee shows its commitment to providing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate post-secondary readiness."*

→ Commissioner Lizzette Reynolds



## Wisconsin

Wisconsin was the first state to adopt PreACT Secure as a growth measure within its state accountability system—going beyond federal minimum requirements to prioritize longitudinal academic progress. The state selected PreACT Secure because of its strong alignment with the ACT and its ability to provide a secure, standards-based assessment. Each spring, all 9th- and 10th-grade students participate in PreACT Secure, establishing a robust baseline for measuring growth through grade 11.

In 2024, the mean composite student growth percentile was 45.6 for economically disadvantaged students and 52.1 for non-economically disadvantaged students, reflecting Wisconsin's commitment to using growth data to understand and address opportunity gaps. By investing in early, aligned assessment data, Wisconsin empowers educators and schools to track progress and support students more effectively on their path to college and career readiness.





# Opportunity and Access



To increase opportunity and college access, states may offer partial or full scholarships to in-state institutions for students who meet certain benchmarks. States may also offer remedial courses or retake opportunities. In many states, ACT is a proud partner in the effort to promote opportunities for all students.

## STATE SUCCESS STORIES

### Alabama

In Alabama, the ACT Fee Waiver program serves as a powerful tool for expanding college access to students from low-income families. Through the program, eligible students can take the ACT for free, access free Kaplan test preparation resources, request unlimited score reports to colleges and universities at no cost, and order free test information releases.

Alabama has demonstrated strong engagement with this opportunity. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 15,217 students in the state used fee waivers. Notably, 67.5% of students who used a fee waiver were students of color, highlighting Alabama's efforts to ensure that more students have a clear, affordable pathway to higher education.





## Louisiana

In Louisiana, the ACT plays a central role in expanding college access through the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a statewide, merit-based scholarship program. TOPS provides scholarships for Louisiana residents attending public colleges and universities, community and technical colleges, approved proprietary and cosmetology schools, and participating independent institutions.

To qualify, students must meet minimum core GPA and ACT Composite score requirements based on the award level: A 17 ACT (or Silver-level WorkKeys score) for TOPS Tech, a 20 for TOPS Opportunity, a 23 for TOPS Performance, and a 27 for TOPS Honors. Although the qualifying score for the Opportunity Award is recalculated annually based on the state's ACT average, it can never fall below 20.

Since 2012, approximately 59,000 Louisiana students have taken the ACT each year, using their scores to unlock meaningful pathways to higher education and career advancement.





## Nebraska

In Nebraska, the ACT opens the door to significant college opportunities through the prestigious Presidential Scholars Program. Any student who earns a 32 or higher on the ACT (or an equivalent SAT score) automatically qualifies for this scholarship, which covers undergraduate tuition, fees, books, housing, and food at any institution within the University of Nebraska system.

In addition to full coverage of educational costs, recipients also receive a \$5,000 annual stipend, further supporting their academic success and college experience. The ACT serves as a powerful tool for Nebraska students to access life-changing scholarship opportunities and pursue their higher education goals.

## Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, the ACT plays a key role in opening doors to higher education through the Academic Scholars Program. Since all seniors must take the ACT to graduate, every student has the opportunity to qualify for this prestigious scholarship, which supports academically outstanding students attending Oklahoma colleges and universities.

Academic Scholars receive financial support covering room, board, tuition, books, and incidental fees for up to eight semesters, with the award amount varying based on the institution attended. To be eligible, applicants must score at or above the 99.5th percentile nationally; for fall 2025, this requires a combined ACT subject score of 137.

Through statewide ACT participation, Oklahoma ensures that every senior has access to meaningful scholarship opportunities and the potential to pursue higher education with reduced financial barriers.



## Tennessee

In Tennessee, the ACT plays a vital role in helping students access the HOPE Scholarship, a program funded by the net proceeds of the state lottery and awarded to eligible first-year students enrolling at qualified postsecondary institutions within sixteen months of high school graduation. Increased HOPE Scholarship qualifications help reduce financial barriers, lower student debt, and advance Tennessee's 2030 postsecondary attainment goals.

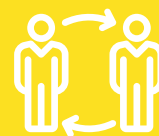
Notably, about one-third of students who earn a high enough ACT score to qualify for a HOPE Scholarship do so as part of the ACT senior retake opportunity. Thanks to the senior retake in 2024, an additional 3,678 students qualified for the HOPE Scholarship—up to \$18,000 per student, totaling \$66 million in scholarship support. Of these students, 1,349 were non-white, reflecting Tennessee's commitment to expanding college access through strategic ACT initiatives.

*"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 of scholarship money."*

➔ A senior at Jefferson County High School



# State Partnerships with ACT Help Drive Student Success



From Alabama to Wyoming, from Hawaii to Vermont, states are leveraging their partnerships with ACT to drive student success. States are using the results of ACT assessments to ensure that students have more opportunities to explore careers, to strengthen accountability systems, and to improve education practices.

Throughout the 2024-2026 school years, 34 states will partner with ACT to give assessments to more than two million students. These partnerships are more than administrative decisions—they are institutional commitments to helping students understand and reach their education and career goals. Whether it's a student earning a scholarship through a senior retake opportunity, a school using growth data to refine instructional practices, or a student leaving high school with a nationally recognized career-readiness credential, the impact of state partnerships is real and measurable.

As states continue to innovate and invest in meaningful college and career readiness assessments, ACT will continue to support these efforts by providing tools, data, and services that help translate assessment results into improved outcomes for students.



