

No improvement: ACT says college exam scores are stagnant

August 26 2015, by Anne Flaherty

U.S. high schools haven't shown much improvement in the past four years when it comes to preparing college-ready graduates, according to the Iowa-based nonprofit group that administers the ACT college entrance exam.

The group says only about 40 percent of graduating high school students who took the ACT exam this year show a "strong readiness" for college in most subject areas. Meanwhile, 31 percent of these students aren't meeting readiness levels in any core subject areas.

These levels are about the same as four years ago. The data also shows negligible changes among ethnic groups since 2011, with white and Asian American students still dramatically outperforming other ethnicities.

ACT Chief Executive Officer Jon Whitmore called the findings a "wake-up call" and said the education system must do more to prepare students, particularly minorities.

"We're talking about hundreds of thousands of U.S. high school graduates who won't earn a two- or four-year college degree because they aren't academically prepared to do so," Whitmore said in a statement. "In the increasingly competitive job market, where decent jobs are requiring more advanced skills and training, this is a huge problem."

The study looked at the 1.9 million students in the 2015 graduating class who took the ACT. This represents about 59 percent of all graduating students. The ACT says the test can help predict how well a student will do in college. This year, the nation's average score was 21 out of a maximum of 36.

According to its findings:

—Asian students outperformed all other ethnic groups in math and science, with 69 percent of Asian students taking the ACT meeting its college readiness standard in math and 57 percent in science.

—African-American students lagged behind significantly in all areas. Only 14 percent of black students taking the ACT test passed the college readiness standard for math, 12 percent in science, 34 percent in English and 19 percent in reading.

—That's compared to 52 percent of white students who passed the college readiness standard in math, 48 percent in science, 75 percent in English and 56 percent in reading.

—About 29 percent of Hispanics who took the ACT passed the readiness standard in math, 23 percent in science, 47 percent in English and 31 percent in reading.

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