

Area students not ready for college?

2007 ACT SCORES

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ACT scores for Illinois' 2007 graduates matched last year's high, and are up a full point in Chicago over five years ago, but the vast majority of Illinois graduates still are not prepared for college, shows data released this week.

Local ACT average scores at area high schools ranged from a low of 18 to a high of **23.1, that at Providence Catholic.**

Only 21 percent of 2007 Illinois graduates scored high enough on the ACT college admission exam to suggest they would succeed in basic college courses in four core areas, ACT officials said. Nationally, 23 percent are ready for college work.

According to the data, African-Americans are particularly unprepared. Just 5 percent of Illinois' black grads scored high enough on the ACT science exam to earn a C or higher in college biology. For whites, it's 33 percent.

"This is something we have to pay attention to and see how we can make sure more students have access to rigorous coursework," state Superintendent Christopher Koch said.

On the high end, 68 Illinois grads earned perfect ACT composite scores of 36, more than double the 2006 number of 33.

Chicago's 2007 ACT average, after a leap last year, inched up just .1, to 17.5. The 2002 average was 16.5.

Nationally, the average ACT composite score also inched up to 21.2, up from 21.1 last year. The ACT covers English, reading, math, science and an optional writing exam.

A record 1.3 million U.S. students in the class of 2007 took the ACT, up by 94,000 students over last year, fueled by growth on the East Coast, where the SAT admission exam has traditionally dominated.

Illinois is one of three states that require juniors take the ACT, whether college-bound or not. It was first mandated for 2002 grads and average composite scores dropped, from 21.6 to 20.1. Scores have risen ever since. The 2007 average is 20.5, the same as 2006.

Since 2002, the percent of kids scoring high enough to handle college work has grown but progress has been slow. In Illinois in 2002, 19 percent were college ready in all four subjects. Now it's 21 percent. Nationally, it was 20 percent in 2002. Now it's 23 percent.

ACT officials also raised concern about what classes students take in high school. Just 38 percent of 2007 Illinois graduates reported taking the ACT's recommended core curriculum of four years of English and three years each of math, science and social science.

That will likely increase. In 2005, Illinois raised its graduation requirements for the first time in 20 years, though they still fall short of ACT's recommended load.

And taking the core doesn't guarantee a student has the skills for college, said Richard L. Ferguson, ACT's chief executive. He wants a boost in the caliber of high school courses. In Illinois, for example, just 16 percent of students who took the core math classes scored high enough on the ACT to indicate success in college algebra.

The state just launched an initiative that will review high school learning standards, evaluate programs for failing schools and improve the state's data system. Chicago began revamping its high school curriculum last year. Both initiatives are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Area ACT Scores	
Providence Catholic	23.1
Joliet Catholic	22.2
Lincoln-Way East	21.9
Lincoln-Way Central	21.7
Lockport	21.2
Morris	21.0
Minooka	20.8
Reed Custer	20.7
Coal City	20.3
Plainfield	19.8
Wilmington	19.3
Joliet Township	18.0
Note: Numbers for individual high schools in Joliet Township and Plainfield school districts were not available. Valley View School District scores were not available because the district is in a "period of correction"; the district expects to get a report Sept. 19.	