

KERA UPDATE

October 1998

#29

ACT and Kentucky, There's Lots More to the Story

KERA Update 28 discussed my initial reactions to the announcement of the 1998 ACT scores for Kentucky and the nation. Since the score release in late August, there has been time for this author and other researchers to examine ACT's Kentucky Public High School data file. To put it mildly, there are some real surprises.

The first eye-catcher was that, in spite of a larger class size, public high school 1998 graduates participated in the ACT in significantly lower numbers than the Class of 1997. The difference was well over 1,000 students.

That drop may be quite significant. It could indicate declining public school student interest in going on to college.

The second eye-catcher involves all other Kentucky students who do not attend public schools. That group includes private school students, home schoolers, GEDs, and so forth.

Other-than-public high school ACT participation recently skyrocketed in Kentucky. From 1996 to 1998, the group

of other-than-public students who took the ACT went up from about 2,900 to around 6,000 students, a jump of over 100 percent.

In an added surprise, the Kentucky Department of Education's estimate for the non-public schools' Class of 1998 senior year membership was only 3,604 students. Where did the rest of the other-than-public school ACT takers come from? Homeschool? GEDs? It's a 2,400 student mystery.

Eye-catcher three is equally amazing. The change in the ACT Composite for Kentucky public school students was barely perceptible from 1993 to 1997, a scant 0.1 point increase from 19.9 to 20.0. That suddenly changed in 1998, when the public school composite jumped up 0.2 points. Of course, this happened at the same time the number of public school ACT takers suddenly dropped.

But, that isn't what really catches the eye. Since 1995, the Composite for other-than-public school ACT takers has dropped dramatically. In the last two years alone, the other-than-public ACT Composite

dropped one full point.

In summation, here is what seems to be happening:

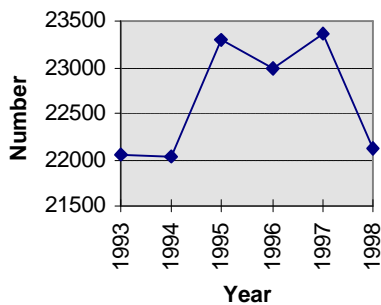
Public school ACT participation dropped. For now this is just a one year trend that could reverse next year, but it could also indicate public student interest in college is starting to decline.

Many more *college-aspiring* pupils are taking the ACT; but, they are doing so as other-than-public school students. In addition, they are scoring lower on the ACT. This is an extended trend.

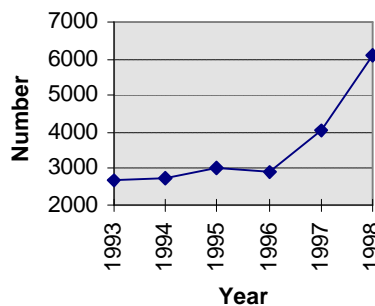
The sustained increase in overall Kentucky participation in the ACT has come *entirely* from the other-than-public sector.

If even part of this is so, it's not good news for KERA!

Number of Kentucky Public School Graduates Who Took The ACT, By Year



Number of Other-Than-Public School Graduates From Kentucky Who Took the ACT, By Year



Average ACT Composite Scores, Kentucky Public School Graduates and Other Than Public School Graduates

