

KERA UPDATE

August 1999

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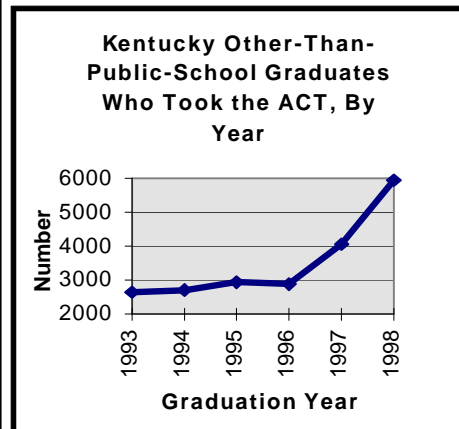
1999 ACT Scores — First Comments

The 1999 graduates' ACT report is out. Here, hopefully, is an informed "first look." But first, a caution:

Don't use the 17 August score release to draw hard conclusions about KERA.

Between 1996 and 1998, there was a dramatic shift in Kentucky ACT demographics. Many more students from diploma sources other than Kentucky public high schools are now taking the ACT. As of 1998, the numbers were 5942 non-public students versus 22,268 public high school grads. That is one out of five total ACT takers, a ratio so large that there can be notable differences between the overall average ACT scores (such as those released on 17 August 1999) and the public high school only performance.

ACT doesn't have accurate data on where this increase originated. They could be GED takers, private schoolers, or homeschoolers. No one knows. In any event, the non-public school ACT taking cohort is much too large to ignore, and statewide ACT averages may not reflect KERA performance. With that caution, here are comments on



the "all student" ACT data:

1. Kentucky's overall ACT performance declined 0.1 points from 1998 to 1999.

The composite score dropped from 20.2 to 20.1.

2. The state composite is now 0.9 points behind the current national average for all students, 20.1 Vs. 21.0. We haven't been that far behind since the early 1980's.

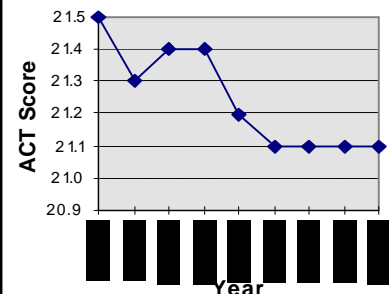
3. Kentucky is falling behind, but it's not because ACT scores drop when more kids take a test.

KDE's assertion that more test takers mean lower scores directly conflicts with their official policy statement that all children can learn at high levels. This weak excuse for a weak education program isn't true. Across the nation, ACT participation went up 27.9% from 1991 to 1999, and the composite score rose 0.4 points. Kentucky participation only went up 20.8%, but our ACT composite did rise a scant 0.1 points.

4. Kentucky students who take all the core courses recommended for college have seen disturbingly declining scores since 1991-92, when KIRIS began.

Reading and math changed -0.3 points, and English, science and composite dropped -0.2 points. Of course, our core students' ACT declines also agree with recently announced sharply increased Freshman remediation rates at Kentucky's four-year universities.

Kentucky Composite ACT, All Students Who Took Core Course Load



5. Kentucky's core course takers are falling behind the nation.

Kentucky's core course takers' composite fell 0.3 points farther behind the nation between 1991 and 1999. Scores shouldn't drop as more students take core course loads *if* course work is of high quality and challenging for all. The rest of the nation has proved that.

6. Core course taking in Kentucky remains well behind the nation.

KDE says more Kentucky students than ever before took the core course load in 1999, which is true. But, core participation is up across the nation (a fact KDE didn't mention). After a decade of reform, only 44% of Kentucky's ACT participants took the recommended core courses in 1999. Nationally, the number is 60%. The state continues to lag badly on this important indicator of future college success.

ACT shows the 1990's have not been kind to Kentucky's college-bound.