

KERA UPDATE

April 2000

About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

#43

Results Matter, But Only If You Have The Real Results

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) recently published *Results Matter*, a tenth anniversary report on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). As often happens when public agencies discuss their own performance, KDE's data has lots of spin. There's a pressing need for better analysis. Thus, this *KERA UPDATE* is the first of several which examine specific data presentations in *Results Matter*.

This *UPDATE* deals with inaccurate portrayal of Kentucky public school performance on the ACT.

Performance of private, parochial, home schooling and GED graduates should not be included in assessments of KERA. But, page 84 in *Results Matter* makes precisely that error. 'Results' indicates that between 1995 and 1998 the number of ACT test takers in Kentucky rose from 26,291 to 28,210. It also shows that ACT participation increased from 63 to 68 percent of the graduates between 1995 and 1999 (a better statistic would be participation as a percent of senior class membership). In any event the numbers look good. **But**, these numbers include private school graduates, GED graduates, and so forth. **These results do not indicate KERA's performance.**

Fortunately, it is possible to isolate ACT performance for public high schools only. ACT computes and releases public high school national averages. And, an ACT database for Kentucky's public high schools permits isolation of scores and participation numbers for Kentucky's public high school graduates. Publicly released data in the KIRIS and CATS transition to adult life tables provides the number of public high school graduates for years from 1995 to 1998, and an advanced

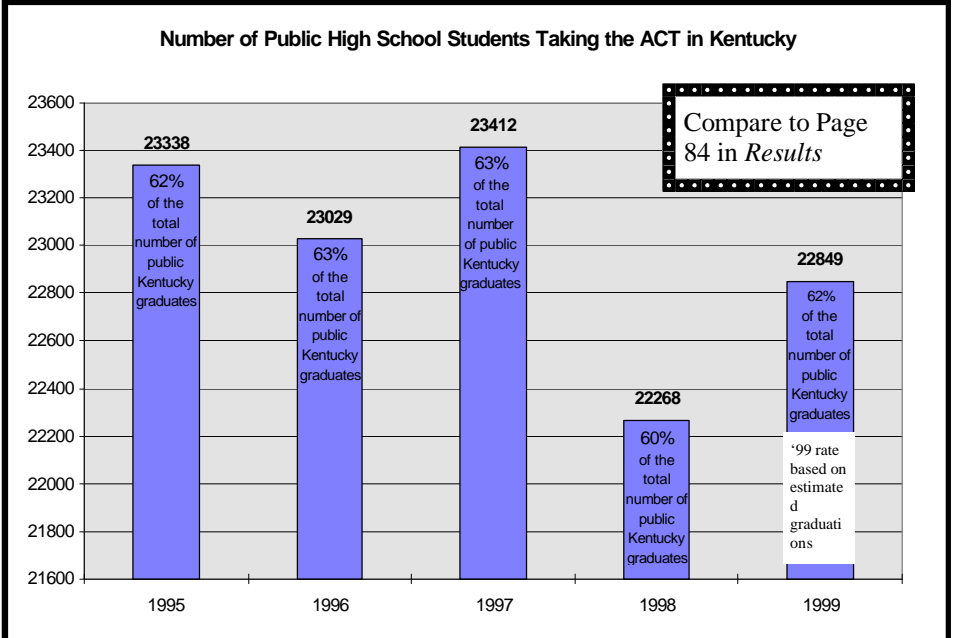
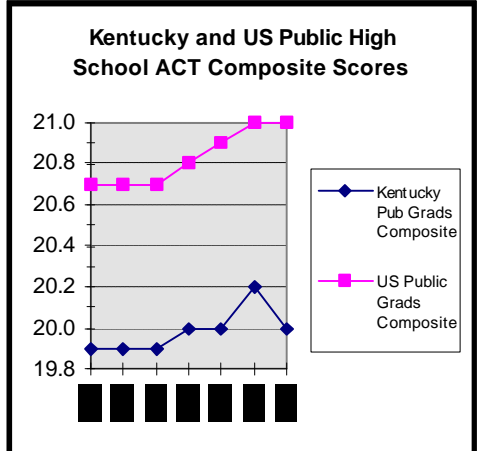
working estimate of the 1999 graduates just became available from KDE.

Sadly, when this public high school only information is plotted in the manner used in *Results Matter*, the bar graph below results.

Notice that this graph indicates, quite in opposition to the impression given by *Results Matter*, that **Kentucky public high school participation on ACT is actually in slight decline.** This is not due to a reduction in public high school class membership but **reflects an actual reduction in the Kentucky public high school graduation rate.**

It is also possible to determine composite ACT scores just for public high schools. When this is done, the graph to the right results. Between 1993 and 1999, Kentucky public high school scores rose just 0.1 points, not the 0.2 point rise

claimed in KDE's report. At the same time, the national public high school composite average rose more rapidly. So, **Kentucky public high school students are taking the ACT in fewer numbers, and their scores are not keeping pace with public school students in the rest of the nation, either.**



Compare to Page 84 in *Results*