

KERA UPDATE

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About The Kentucky Education Reform Act

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Kentucky's ACT Problems Examined in New SREB Report

A new report from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) raises more uncomfortable questions about Kentucky education. *ACT and SAT Scores in the South: The Challenge to Lead*, discusses a number of issues involved with these college entrance tests and provides important new data. The results paint a very unsatisfactory picture of Kentucky's 13-year effort to improve its schools.

One key finding, discussed in earlier *KERA Updates*, is the fact that Kentucky's ACT scores have not changed since 1992. This flat performance stands in sharp contrast to the rapidly rising scores on the state's "home grown" assessment, called CATS. Flat ACT performance indicates that CATS is providing an inflated picture of progress.

SREB data indicates that Kentucky increased the number of students taking the ACT between 1992 and 2002. However, among SREB states where ACT predominates, half increased participation levels by larger margins. In 2002, the only SREB "ACT state" with a lower ACT participation rate was West Virginia. But, West Virginia borders several states where colleges require the SAT, and West Virginia has a higher SAT participation rate than Kentucky. So that situation may be a bit misleading.

Over the decade, only two "ACT states," Tennessee and Mississippi, fared worse on ACT than Kentucky did; but, both of these states had far bigger increases in the percentage of their students

who took ACT in this interval. Mississippi participation increased 16 percent and Tennessee increased ACT participation by a whopping 33 percent. Kentucky only increased 8 percent. In 2002, 15 percent more Mississippi graduates took ACT than was true in Kentucky. Tennessee eclipsed Kentucky's participation rate by 24 points!!! On the participation statistic, at least, Kentucky can no longer say thank goodness for Mississippi!! Now, even the Magnolia State has more students who at least make an attempt to go on to higher education!

In the area of minority performance on the ACT, SREB data makes Kentucky's reform look even more questionable. The SREB data shows that between 1998 and

2002 no state had a larger drop in Black Student ACT scores than Kentucky. In fact, even Kentucky's White students had a drop in scores in this interval, and that White score decline was larger than any other SREB ACT state's. In addition, while they form a fairly small portion of the state's school population, Hispanics in Kentucky fared much worse than the state's Black students, losing almost a full point on ACT's 36 point scale between 1998 and 2002.

Overall, SREB reports the South is not reaching "parity" with the rest of the nation. And, Kentucky is nowhere close to parity, not even in the South. That should not be the case after more than a decade of very expensive education reform.

Data from the SREB Report, States Where ACT Predominates

	1992 Percent Tested	1992 Average Score	2002 Percent Tested	2002 Average Score	Score Change 92 to 02	Partici- pation Change 92 to 02	Whites Change in ACT Score 98 to 02	Blacks Change in ACT Score 98 to 02	Hispanics Change in ACT Score 98 to 02
AL	59%	19.8	75%	20.1	0.3	16%	0.1	-0.1	-0.1
AR	63%	20.0	75%	20.2	0.2	12%	-0.1	-0.4	-1.3
KY	63%	20.0	71%	20.0	0.0	8%	-0.2	-0.4	-0.8
LA	74%	19.4	78%	19.6	0.2	4%	0.4	-0.2	0.9
MS	70%	18.8	86%	18.6	-0.2	16%	0	-0.3	-0.6
OK	64%	20.0	71%	20.5	0.5	7%	0	-0.1	-0.7
TN	62%	20.2	95%	20.0	-0.2	33%	0.3	0	0
WV	56%	19.8	64%	20.3	0.5	8%	0.2	-0.4	N/A