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ACT Introduces New STEM College Readiness Benchmark; Results Reveal Limited Readiness for College STEM Coursework (http://www.act.org/newsroom/act-introduces-new-stem-college-readiness-benchmark-results-reveal-limited-readiness-for-college-stem-coursework/)

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IOWA CITY, Iowa—Relatively few STEM-interested students are well prepared to succeed in college STEM courses, according to *The Condition of STEM 2015 (http://www.act.org/stemcondition/15/)*, released today by ACT.

The report shows that only 26 percent of ACT-tested 2015 graduates who were interested in STEM met or surpassed the new ACT STEM College Readiness Benchmark. The benchmark, which makes its debut in this report, is an indicator of whether a student is well prepared for the types of first-year college courses required for a college STEM-related major.

"These findings confirm the conclusions we drew from our *Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015* report—namely, that the country needs to take strong, urgent action to avoid a looming crisis in college and career readiness," said Marten Roorda, ACT chief executive officer. "This is especially troubling in the important area of STEM, which has a growing impact on the nation's competitiveness in the global economy."

Students who meet or surpass the ACT STEM Benchmark have a high (75 percent) probability of earning a grade of C or higher in first-year college STEM courses such as calculus, biology, chemistry and physics. They are also more likely to earn good grades, persist in a college STEM major and earn a STEM-related bachelor's degree than those who didn't meet the benchmark.

The new benchmark was developed through research on actual student success in college courses, using the same methodology as the established ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in English, math, reading and science. Recent ACT research indicated that academic readiness for college coursework in STEM subject areas may require higher scores than the current ACT benchmarks in math and science.

The ACT *Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015 (http://act.org/research/policymakers/cccr15/)* report, released in August, reported 42 percent of all ACT-tested 2015 graduates met or surpassed the ACT College Readiness Benchmark in math, while 38 percent met or surpassed the benchmark in science. Among STEM-interested grads, 49 percent achieved the math benchmark, and 45 percent achieved the science benchmark.

The STEM benchmark is based on the new STEM score that was added to ACT student score reports starting this fall. The new score represents students' combined performance on the ACT math and science tests.

"Our goal with the new ACT STEM score was to empower students by providing them with more detailed insights on their readiness, so that they can better plan for success after high school," said Roorda.

Overall interest in STEM remains high, as approximately half (49 percent) of the 1.9 million ACT-tested 2015 graduates had either an expressed interest (planning to pursue a STEM major) or a measured interest (having a high ACT Interest Inventory score in STEM areas) in STEM overall. This is unchanged from last year.

Students who have both an expressed and measured interest in STEM continue to be more likely than others to be ready for college STEM coursework. However, even among those students, two-thirds fail to meet the ACT STEM benchmark, suggesting they are likely to struggle in such coursework.

"This research is important because it informs policy and program leaders about where gaps and opportunities lie in preparing tomorrow's STEM workforce," said Jeffrey Weld, executive director of the Iowa Governors STEM Advisory Council. "Without this research, we would be throwing darts at the problem blindfolded. The annual ACT STEM Condition report has rapidly become the bellwether guidepost counted on by states for gauging our progress."

The findings suggest interest in teaching STEM subject areas continues to lag among high school graduates. Less than 1 percent of all ACT-tested graduates expressed an interest in teaching math or science. Despite a larger number of ACT-tested and STEM-interested students this year, the number interested in teaching math and science was lower than in 2014.

The *Condition of STEM 2015* reports for the nation and for each state can be accessed for free here (http://www.act.org/stemcondition).

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