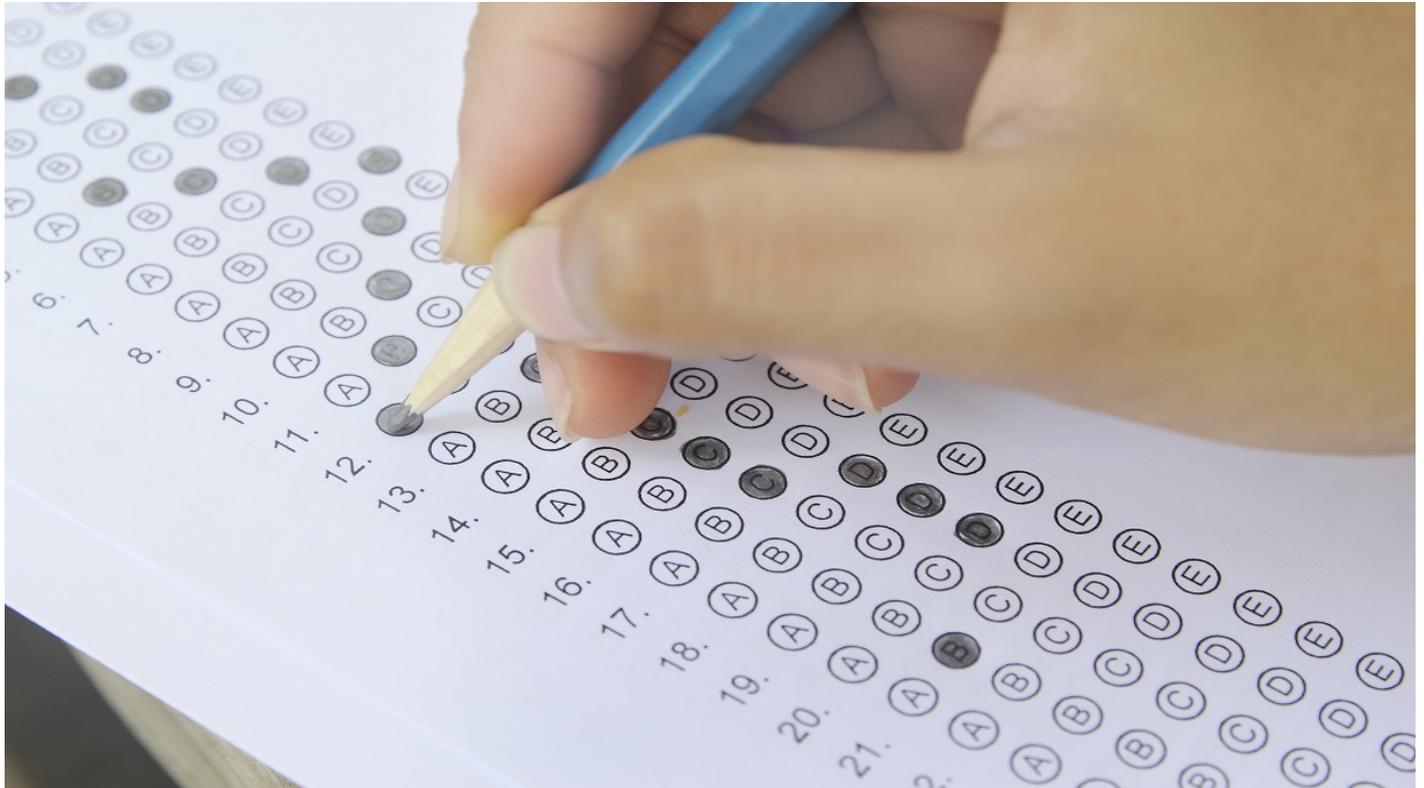




Let's Talk about the ACT

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By: Brittany Wagner

At first glance, this year's ACT results in Missouri might give cause for optimism, but a little more digging shows that Missouri high schools could do much more to prepare students for college.

Last week, the *Jefferson City News Tribune* [reported](#) on Missouri's recently released ACT scores. The 2014–2015 school year was the first year in which every 11th-grader in Missouri was required to take the test, which in theory predicts how well a student will do in college. The *Tribune* reported that Missouri increased its average score from 21.6 to 21.7, and that Missouri students outscored national averages in every subject area.

But before we pop the champagne bottle, let's talk about the ACT.

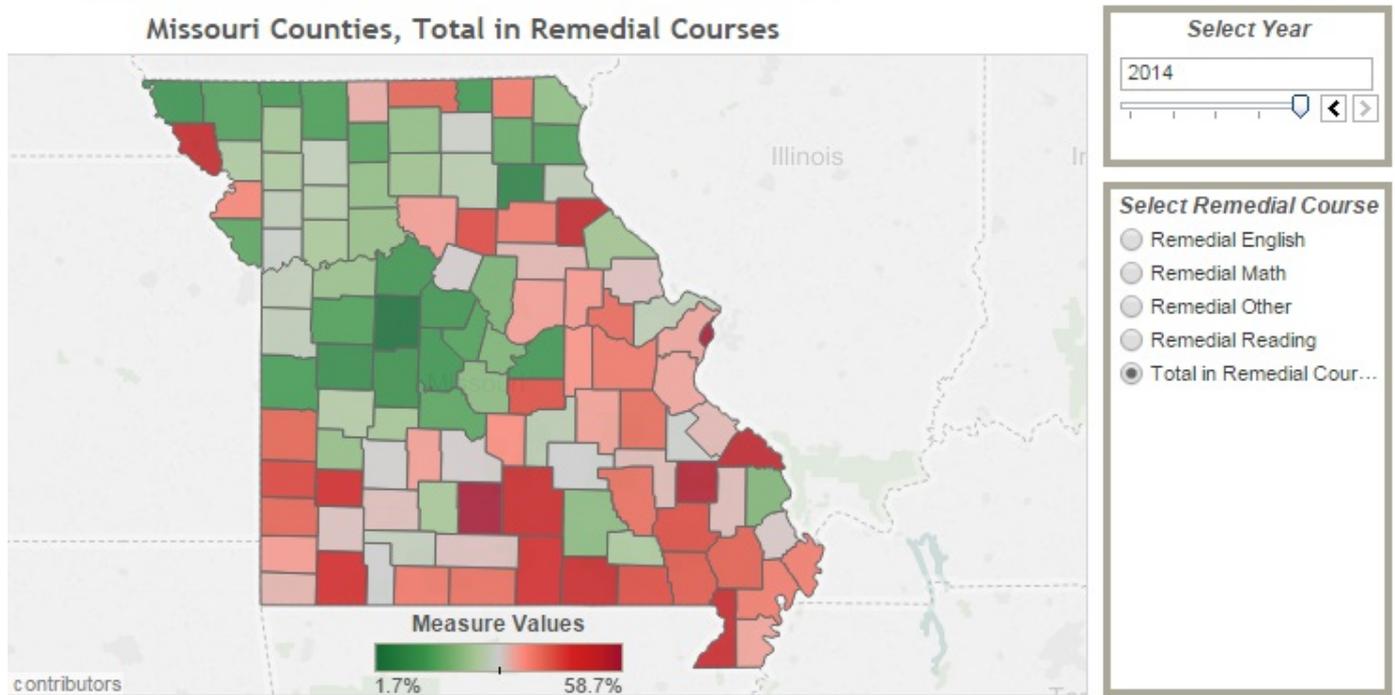
The ACT is an imperfect tool for comparing students from different states. The test is more popular in some states than in others, so participation rates vary. [Only thirteen states](#) had 100 percent participation, and 59 percent of students participated nationally. Where participation is voluntary, we might expect scores to be higher on average, as only students interested in taking the test actually take it.

The [participation rate](#) in Massachusetts, for example, was 28 percent. The small number of Massachusetts students who took the ACT in 2015 scored a 24.4 on average. Is that because Massachusetts has a superior education system, or because the composition of students is

different? New Hampshire, Maine, New York, and Connecticut were also among the top performing states on this year's ACT, but participation in those states ranged from only 10 to 28 percent.

Scores on the ACT should be paired with other data to determine how well schools, districts, and states are preparing students for college. Let's take a look at another measure—remediation rates. [The map](#) below shows the percentage of students by county who enrolled in remedial coursework in college (coursework they already should have completed in high school) in 2014. Red indicates higher percentages and green indicates lower percentages of enrollment in remedial courses. In the lower half of the state, there is a whole lot of red—63.3 percent of graduates from Ash Grove High School in Ash Grove, Missouri, for example, enrolled in remedial coursework in 2014.

High School Graduates Report: 2014



Getting students to college is important, but it's only half the battle. Missouri should not lose sight of the goal of true college readiness. It is great to see that as more students are taking the test, scores are going up. But with remediation rates like those in Missouri, it's clear that much work remains to be done.

About the Author



Brittany Wagner
Education Policy Research Assistant

Brittany Wagner was an education policy research assistant at the Show-Me Institute.

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[3] <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/08/25/act-scores-released-michigan/32364173/>

[4] <http://blog.prepscholar.com/average-sat-scores-by-state-most-recent>

[5] http://dhe.mo.gov/data/documents/HSGR_remedial_041415.htm

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Show-Me Institute

5297 Washington Place	3645 Troost Avenue
Saint Louis, MO 63108	Kansas City, MO 64109
Phone: (314) 454-0647	Phone: (816) 287-0370
Fax: (314) 454-0667	

Email: info@showmeinstitute.org

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