

# Flexible Assessment Options for High School Graduation

Why Students Should Have  
A Choice Between ACT,  
ACT WorkKeys, and ASVAB



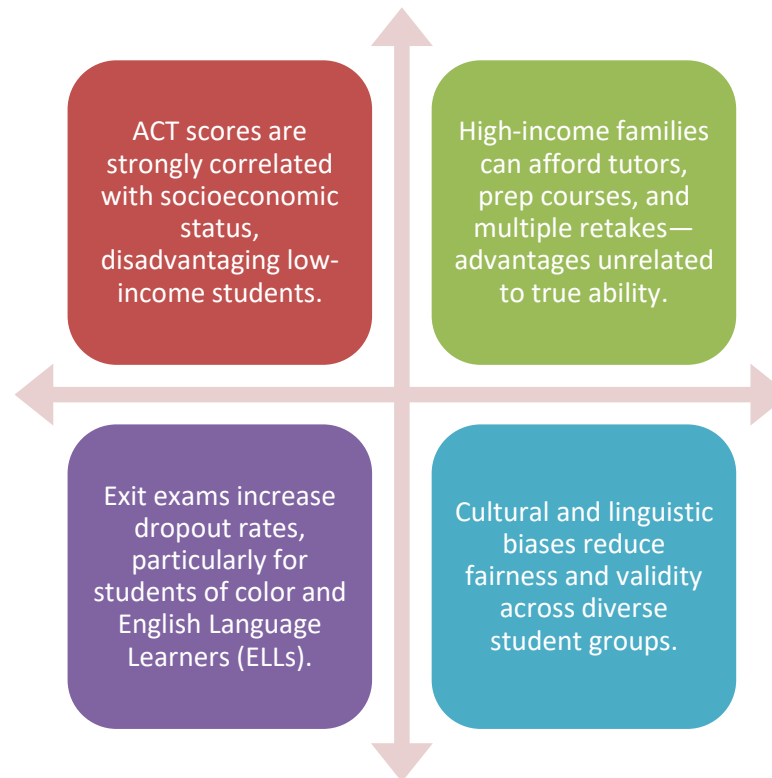
# Why the ACT Should Not Be the Only option for Graduation

Many educators and policymakers oppose requiring the ACT for graduation.

A single, high-stakes test is an inadequate and inequitable measure of student learning, readiness, and potential.

Multi-pathway systems are fairer and better reflect students' diverse strengths.

# Issues of Equity and Bias



# Inaccurate Measure of Readiness and Learning

A single test cannot reflect all aspects of knowledge, skill, and readiness for postsecondary success.

The ACT prioritizes speed and surface-level recall over deep problem-solving and creativity.

Tying diplomas to ACT scores leads to curriculum narrowing—schools 'teach to the test'.

Important areas like arts, civic education, and project-based learning are often sacrificed.

High school GPA and course rigor are stronger predictors of college success than ACT scores.

# Negative Educational and Psychological Consequences



High-stakes testing increases student stress and test anxiety, leading to underperformance.



Teachers feel pressured to focus on test preparation rather than authentic instruction.



Students who pass all coursework can still be denied diplomas due to one test result.



This undermines the value of four years of learning and diminishes teacher judgment.

# How Many Colleges Actually Require the ACT?

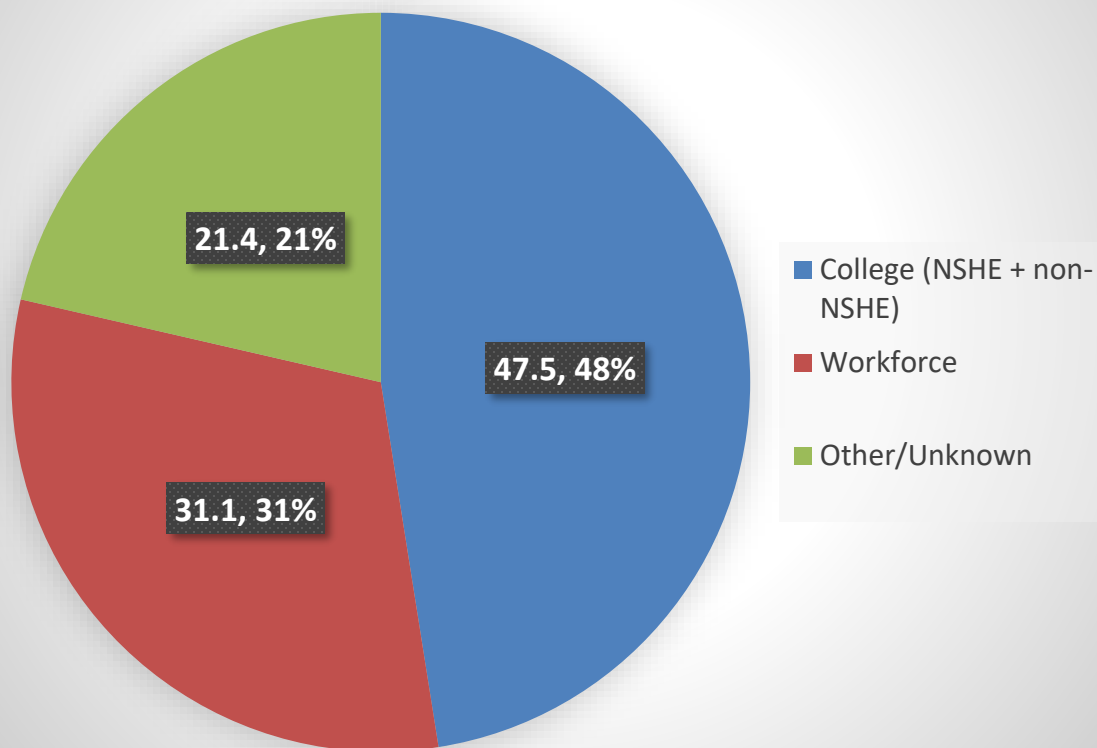
Nationally: Only about 5–6% (~300–350) of colleges still require the ACT/SAT.

Most U.S. institutions are now test-optional following pandemic-era policy changes.

Nevada: Major universities (UNLV, UNR) are test-optional; none require ACT for admission.

# Nevada High School Graduate Outcomes

Post-Graduation Destinations (Nevada,  
2024 Cohort)



# State Shifts Toward Multi-Pathway Graduation Models

Many states have replaced exit exams with multi-pathway systems.

Students can now demonstrate readiness through grades, certifications, or college coursework.

This approach honors academic, vocational, and military pathways equally.

Multi-pathway models ensure fairness, inclusivity, and relevance for all learners.

# Pennsylvania's Act 158: Multi-Pathway Graduation

Pennsylvania's Act 158 offers five pathways to graduation readiness:

1. Alternate Assessment: ACT ( $\geq 21$ ) or ASVAB (AFQT  $\geq 31$ )
2. Evidence-Based: ACT WorkKeys Silver or higher + credentials
3. CTE Concentrator: Industry-based certification or technical program completion
4. Keystone Proficiency: Proficient/Advanced in Keystone Exams
5. Keystone Composite: Combined passing scores across Keystone Exams

This model validates college, career, and military readiness equally.

# Mississippi's Alternate Assessment Options

Mississippi Policy 3804 allows ACT, WorkKeys, and ASVAB to demonstrate mastery for diploma and endorsements.

1. ACT  $\geq 17$ , WorkKeys Silver + Certification
2. ASVAB  $\geq 43$  or 36 + Cert
3. CTE Endorsement : WorkKeys Silver required
4. Academic Endorsement: ACT English  $\geq 17-18$ , Math  $\geq 19-22$

This framework acknowledges multiple forms of readiness and aligns with workforce needs.

# Validation of Diverse Career Pathways

Offering assessment choice supports multiple pathways to college and career readiness:

- ACT (College Path): Measures academic readiness for four-year universities.
- ACT WorkKeys (Career/Technical Path): Evaluates applied workplace skills; earning an NCRC shows employability.
- ASVAB (Military Path): Determines military enlistment eligibility and placement.

This approach validates all postsecondary ambitions, academic, vocational, and military, instead of prioritizing one as more important.

# Increased Student Engagement and Motivation



## **Students are more invested when assessments align with their goals.**

Military-bound students value ASVAB results that determine enlistment roles.

Technical students are motivated by earning the NCRC credential.

College-bound students prepare for the ACT to enhance admissions chances.



## **Relevance of testing fosters engagement, purpose, and stronger performance.**

# Equity and Reduced Testing Anxiety

A single, college-focused test can disadvantage students whose strengths are in vocational or applied learning.

Multiple assessment options create equitable opportunities for all learners.

Tests like WorkKeys and ASVAB assess real-world, contextual skills.

Reduces stress from one-size-fits-all high-stakes exams.



These pathways recognize different types of intelligence and readiness.

# Where Nevada Ranks Nationally (K–12)

WalletHub 2025  
overall rank: 46th of 51  
(including DC)

Quality sub-rank: 45th;  
Safety sub-rank: 49th

Notable metrics:

Source: WalletHub,  
“States with the Best &  
Worst School Systems  
(2025)”

Pupil–teacher ratio:  
49th (one of the  
highest)

Median ACT score: tied  
for 49th

# Why a Low K–12 Rank Matters for Nevada



WORKFORCE & WAGES: HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IS LINKED TO HIGHER EARNINGS AND LOWER UNEMPLOYMENT.



AFFECTS TALENT PIPELINES FOR NEVADA'S GROWTH SECTORS (TECH, LOGISTICS, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING, CLEAN ENERGY, HEALTHCARE).



PRODUCTIVITY & GROWTH: EDUCATION QUALITY IS TIED TO LONG-RUN STATE GDP AND INNOVATION CAPACITY.



PUBLIC BUDGETS: LOWER ATTAINMENT SUPPRESSES TAX BASES AND RAISES SAFETY-NET DEMANDS.



COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: EDUCATION CORRELATES WITH BETTER HEALTH, CIVIC PARTICIPATION, AND RESILIENCE.



SOURCES: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (2025); BROOKINGS/NCES SYNTHESSES.

# What Moves the Needle?

Early literacy & high-dosage tutoring (K–3 and catch-up in grades 4–8).

Attendance & engagement: data-driven chronic absenteeism reduction.


Teacher pipeline & retention: compensation, mentoring, and targeted licensure pathways (STEM/SPED).

Smaller K–3 class sizes where feasible; strategic aides/co-teaching models elsewhere.


CTE & dual enrollment: align pathways to Nevada's priority industries.

## Key Insights

States with the highest ACT scores generally have the lowest participation rates.



No state requires a specific ACT score for graduation.



High participation → lower average scores; low participation → higher averages.

# 2024 States with the Highest ACT Scores

Rank	State / Jurisdiction	Avg. Composite	Participation Rate
1	District of Columbia	26.7	17%
T-2	California	26.5	3%
T-2	Connecticut	26.5	8%
4	Massachusetts	26.1	7%
5	New Hampshire	25.9	4%

# Why Low Participation = High Scores

Lower participation means mostly college-bound, high-achieving students take the ACT.

100% participation states include all students, lowering averages.

Example: Wyoming — highest 100% participation score: 19.1.

# States Requiring All Juniors to Take the ACT (2024)

State	Requirement	Graduation Impact	Avg. Score
Alabama	Required for all juniors	No score required	18.0
Kentucky	Required for all juniors	No score required	18.6
Mississippi	Required for all juniors	No score required	17.7
Tennessee	Required for all juniors	No score required	18.8
Wyoming	Required for all juniors	No score required	19.1

For comparison, Nevada's average ACT score is 17.2

# Conclusion



ALLOWING STUDENTS TO  
CHOOSE BETWEEN ACT, ACT  
WORKKEYS, AND ASVAB  
ENSURES ASSESSMENTS ALIGN  
WITH INDIVIDUAL GOALS.



THIS POLICY PROMOTES  
EQUITY, VALIDATES DIVERSE  
FUTURES, AND RECOGNIZES  
THAT COLLEGE, CAREER, AND  
MILITARY PATHS ARE ALL  
VALUABLE.



AS SEEN IN PENNSYLVANIA  
AND MISSISSIPPI, FLEXIBLE  
GRADUATION PATHWAYS  
ENHANCE FAIRNESS AND  
ENGAGEMENT WHILE  
MAINTAINING RIGOR.



IMPROVEMENT IN NEVADA'S  
NATIONAL RANKING IN  
EDUCATION WILL DRIVE  
INCREASED ECONOMIC AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE STATE.

# References

- ACT Class of 2024 State Report
- Pennsylvania Department of Education – Act 158 Guidance
- Mississippi Department of Education – Policy 3804
- Fair Test (2024) – Test-Optional College List
- Spark Admissions (2024) – ACT/SAT Requirement Analysis
- Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Statewide Outcomes Report
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- WalletHub (2025): States with the Best & Worst School Systems
- BLS Monthly Labor Review (2025): The economics of education in 12 facts.