

# Assessment Brief

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## 2009 ACT RESULTS

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### ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of the ACT college-admissions examination for students in Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) and provides a comparison between the VBCPS scores and ACT results at the state and national levels. A total of 721 VBCPS students in the graduating class of 2009 took the ACT during their last three years of high school. Although the average scores of the 2009 VBCPS graduates decreased slightly in all four subject tests from the previous year's scores and were lower than the average scores at the state level, the Virginia Beach scores were higher than the average scores of 2009 graduates at the national level on three of the four subject tests. The VBCPS average composite score of 21.3 was higher than the national average composite score of 21.1, but lower than the state ACT score of 21.9.

### BACKGROUND

In fall 2009, ACT, Inc. celebrated the 50th anniversary of the administration of its first test, the ACT Assessment. The American College Testing Program, Inc. was established as a not-for-profit organization in 1959, when most colleges wanted to increase their enrollments to accommodate the growing number of students who aspired to a postsecondary education. Since 1960, the ACT has been administered to high school students in all 50 states, and ACT scores are accepted by all four-year colleges and universities across the nation. Thousands of postsecondary institutions—including scholarship agencies, state educational systems, individual public and private universities, junior and community colleges, and technical schools—now require or recommend that applicants submit results from the ACT.<sup>1</sup>

The ACT is an achievement exam comprised of curriculum-based, multiple-choice tests in the four areas of English, mathematics, reading, and science. A writing test that measures students' skills in planning and writing a short essay is offered, but

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<sup>1</sup>ACT, Inc., < <http://www.act.org>>, accessed on October 6, 2009.

optional. According to ACT, Inc., the ACT is “designed to measure the academic skills that are taught in [high] schools and deemed important for success in first-year college courses.”<sup>2</sup> Students receive a score on a scale of 1 to 36 on each subject test along with a composite score, which is the average of the four core subject test scores. On the writing test, students are given a writing subscore on a scale of 2 to 12 and a combined English/writing score on a scale of 1 to 36.

It should be noted that the scores reported in this brief are derived from test data from students who took the ACT during their sophomore, junior, or senior year in high school and were expected to graduate in 2009, based on the data provided at the time of testing. Only the most recent ACT scores were used for students who took the ACT more than once.

## ACT PARTICIPATION

The number of students who take the ACT and the participation rate for VBCPS graduates continues to increase each year. A total of 721 seniors in the graduating class of 2009 from all 11 Virginia Beach high schools as well as Virginia Beach Central Academy took the ACT during their last three years of high school. This was an increase of 25 percent in the number of VBCPS test takers from the previous year. Nationally, the number of seniors who took the ACT increased by just over 4 percent from 2008 to 2009, while Virginia had a 6 percent increase in ACT test takers from the previous graduating class. The total number of ACT test takers over the past five years is shown in Table 1, along with the VBCPS participation rate.

**Table 1**  
**Number and Percent of Graduates Taking the ACT – Five-Year Trends**

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
VBCPS	448	453	539	577	<b>721</b>
Percent of Graduates	10%	10%	11%	11%	<b>14%</b>
Virginia	10,806	11,519	14,653	16,896	<b>17,902</b>
Nation	1,186,251	1,206,455	1,300,599	1,421,941	<b>1,480,469</b>

Source: ACT, Inc.

## ACT COMPOSITE SCORES AND TEST RESULTS BY SUBJECT

A summary of ACT results for the last five high school graduating classes in Virginia Beach, and data for students in the class of 2009 at the state and national levels is contained in Table 2 on the following page. The Virginia Beach average composite score of 21.3 for 2009 graduates was lower than the score of 21.6 for 2008 graduates. This was the result of the average scores on all four subject-area tests showing a decrease from the average scores of the previous year’s graduating class. The Virginia Beach composite scores and average scores on each subject test were higher than the corresponding scores at the national level, with the exception of the English test score, which was one tenth of a point below the national average. The VBCPS average composite score of 21.3 was lower than the 21.9 average of 2009 graduates at the state level, and each of the subject test scores of Virginia Beach graduates were also below the average subject test scores of senior ACT test takers in the class of 2009 across Virginia.

<sup>2</sup>ACT, Inc., 2009 ACT College Readiness Report News Release, <<http://www.act.org/news/releases/2009/crr.html>>, accessed on October 6, 2009.

**Table 2**  
**Average ACT Scores – Five-Year Trends**

Graduation Year	English			Math			Reading			Science			Composite		
	VBCPS	VA	Nation	VBCPS	VA	Nation	VBCPS	VA	Nation	VBCPS	VA	Nation	VBCPS	VA	Nation
2005	20.7	20.5	20.4	20.8	20.6	20.7	21.3	21.2	21.3	21.2	20.6	20.9	21.1	20.8	20.9
2006	20.0	20.6	20.6	21.0	21.0	20.8	20.8	21.4	21.4	20.6	20.7	20.9	20.8	21.1	21.1
2007	20.3	21.0	20.7	21.1	21.2	21.0	20.9	21.7	21.5	21.0	21.1	21.0	21.0	21.4	21.2
2008	20.9	21.5	20.6	21.9	21.8	21.0	21.7	22.2	21.4	21.5	21.3	20.8	21.6	21.8	21.1
<b>2009</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>21.1</b>

Source: ACT, Inc.

### ACT SCORES BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

The average ACT composite scores for VBCPS graduates over the past five years were disaggregated by racial/ethnic group and are included in Table 3. Additionally, the scores by racial/ethnic group for 2009 graduates in Virginia and across the nation are listed in the table. The average scores for each of the racial/ethnic groups in Virginia Beach exceeded the average ACT scores of their counterparts across the nation in 2009. African American students in the VBCPS class of 2009 also scored higher, on average, than African American students in Virginia, while the average score of the VBCPS Asian/Pacific Islander group was the same as their peers at the state level. The largest decrease in composite score from the previous year was for Caucasian/White students, whose average score dropped from 23.1 in 2008 to 22.5 in 2009. The greater variation in average scores from year to year for Hispanic students and Asian/Pacific Islanders is likely the result of the relatively low numbers for these groups in Virginia Beach.

**Table 3**  
**Average ACT Composite Scores by Race/Ethnicity – Five-Year Trends<sup>3</sup>**

Group	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2009 Virginia Score	2009 Nation Score
	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score	N	Score		
African American	98	18.0	121	17.7	109	17.5	144	18.2	<b>200</b>	<b>18.1</b>	17.6	16.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	28	21.8	23	23.5	22	21.2	46	21.8	<b>53</b>	<b>23.6</b>	23.6	23.2
Caucasian/White	249	22.5	223	21.9	292	22.3	313	23.1	<b>387</b>	<b>22.5</b>	23.1	22.2
Hispanic	16	18.5	9	22.3	12	20.0	22	20.9	<b>29</b>	<b>20.6</b>	21.0	18.7
Other/No Response	56	21.1	75	21.2	103	21.0	51	22.3	<b>48</b>	<b>21.9</b>	22.8	20.9
All Students	448	21.1	453	20.8	539	21.0	577	21.6	<b>721</b>	<b>21.3</b>	21.9	21.1

Source: ACT, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>Only racial/ethnic groups with more than ten test takers in at least one of the five years are included in the table.

## ACT COLLEGE READINESS BENCHMARK SCORES

Also reported by ACT, Inc. are College Readiness Benchmark Scores and the percentage of graduates meeting or exceeding those benchmarks. According to ACT, “a benchmark score is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college courses.”<sup>4</sup> As shown in Table 4, over half of the 2009 Virginia Beach graduates who took the ACT met or exceeded the English and reading benchmark scores, while fewer than half reached the benchmark score in mathematics and science. The percentage of VBCPS seniors who met or surpassed the reading benchmark remained the same as the percentage for the previous year, but the percentages for Virginia Beach students in the other subject areas all decreased from 2008. Although the VBCPS percentages were lower than the percentages at the state level for all four subject areas, the percentages of local seniors in the class of 2009 were higher than the percentages of students meeting the benchmarks at the national level in all of the subject areas. Nearly one fourth of 2009 Virginia Beach graduates met or surpassed the benchmarks on all four subject-area tests; this was higher than the national percentage but somewhat lower than the percentage of Virginia graduates who met the benchmark on all of the subject-area tests.

**Table 4**  
**Percent of Virginia Beach Students Meeting or Exceeding**  
**ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores – Five-Year Trends**

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>English (Benchmark Score=18)</b>	<b>Math (Benchmark Score=22)</b>	<b>Reading (Benchmark Score=21)</b>	<b>Science (Benchmark Score=24)</b>	<b>Meeting All Benchmarks</b>
2005	448	71%	43%	54%	28%	23%
2006	453	66%	43%	50%	26%	22%
2007	539	68%	47%	51%	30%	24%
2008	577	71%	51%	55%	32%	25%
<b>2009</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>24%</b>
Virginia - 2009	17,902	74%	49%	59%	33%	27%
Nation - 2009	1,480,469	67%	42%	53%	28%	23%

Source: ACT, Inc.

## ACT RESULTS BY HIGH SCHOOL

Between 30 and 96 students in the class of 2009 at each VBCPS high school took the ACT. More than 75 students took the ACT at five of the schools, with First Colonial having the most test takers. The average composite scores at Cox, First Colonial, Kempsville, Ocean Lakes, and Princess Anne high schools exceeded the average composite score for the nation, and the composite scores for all but one of these schools surpassed the average composite ACT score for Virginia. Table 5 on the next page includes ACT data for each VBCPS high school.

<sup>4</sup>ACT, Inc., *College Readiness Benchmark Scores*, <<http://www.act.org/news/data/09/collegeready.html#benchmark>>, accessed on October 7, 2009.

**Table 5  
Virginia Beach ACT Results by High School – 2009**

School	N	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
Bayside	56	18.6	20.0	20.0	20.3	19.8
Cox	78	22.7	23.0	23.2	21.9	22.8
First Colonial	96	20.5	21.8	21.5	21.3	21.4
Green Run	49	17.0	18.8	19.1	18.6	18.5
Kellam	65	21.2	20.5	21.4	20.6	21.0
Kempsville	30	22.3	22.4	22.8	22.4	22.6
Landstown	48	18.8	20.3	20.6	20.3	20.1
Ocean Lakes	81	22.3	23.3	22.6	23.1	23.0
Princess Anne	94	22.0	23.5	23.6	22.4	23.0
Salem	83	18.9	19.9	19.4	19.6	19.6
Tallwood	38	19.1	20.1	20.0	20.3	19.9
<b>VBCPS<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>721</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>21.3</b>
Virginia	17,902	21.7	21.8	22.3	21.4	21.9
Nation	1,480,469	20.6	21.0	21.4	20.9	21.1

Source: ACT, Inc.

### ACT OPTIONAL WRITING TEST SCORES

Two additional ACT scores are reported for students who take the optional writing test. The essay subscore is rated on a scale ranging from 2 to 12, and the combined English/writing score—which is derived by combining the student’s score on the English test with their essay subscore—is on a scale of 1 to 36. A total of 467 seniors from the VBCPS class of 2009 chose to take the ACT writing test. The average essay subscore for these students was 6.9, which was lower than the Virginia and national average essay subscores. The average combined English/writing score for 2009 Virginia Beach graduates was also lower than the English/writing average at the state and national levels. These scores are reported in Table 6 below.

**Table 6  
ACT Optional Writing Test Results – 2009**

Level	N	Essay	English/Writing Combined
VBCPS	467	6.9	20.3
Virginia	11,474	7.3	21.8
Nation	814,713	7.2	20.8

Source: ACT, Inc.

<sup>5</sup>ACT data for students attending Virginia Beach Central Academy are included in the overall figures for Virginia Beach but are not listed separately because of the small number of test takers.