

new generation  
same passion



“The one fact of supreme importance is that the ACT program is now firmly established as part of the bone and sinew of American education itself.”

JEAN PAUL MATHER, PRESIDENT  
ACT ANNUAL REPORT, 1959–1960

act<sup>2015</sup>  
annual  
report

ACT®

**OUR MISSION**

Helping people achieve  
education and  
workplace success.



## A page has turned.

Marten Roorda, our new Chief Executive Officer, has arrived at ACT after 13 years as CEO of Cito, a not-for-profit assessment organization in the Netherlands.

Through his Cito leadership and his work at professional associations worldwide, Marten has established a reputation for excellence in assessment that spans the globe. He succeeds Jon Whitmore, who retired at the end of the fiscal year after five years of growth at ACT—in the number of people we serve, the revenues we earn, the skills within our organization, and our impact outside of it.

As CEOs of their respective organizations, the two leaders grappled with issues unimaginable in the 1950s, the docile decade when ACT was transforming ground-breaking ideas into on-the-ground realities.

Or were those years as carefree as we think?

Many of the challenges confronting our first leaders have clear analogues to those we face today. The need to administer assessments, deliver scores, and use the resulting insights in “Helping people achieve education and workplace success” remains intact.

Also unchanged is the passion with which our founders threw themselves at these challenges. Their examples provide models for us to emulate.

Our first leaders forever changed assessment.

They made history.

While it's sometimes hard to remember, as we work every day to create new and better ways to help people achieve education and workplace success...

We're making history too.



Jean Paul Mather, ACT's first president

Virtually every organization that has enjoyed the good fortune of contributing to the American cultural landscape a half century or longer has reinvented itself several times during its existence.

ACT, on the other hand, has remained organized around its original purpose, a consistency that is particularly striking when viewing our founding documents.

Jean Paul Mather, previously the president of the University of Massachusetts, was named ACT's first president in the spring of 1960. He wrote ACT's first annual report during his first few months on the job.

The issues he explored still resonate today. In language that could be found in any contemporary newspaper, Mather made the case for college and career readiness. In service to that goal, he argued we must always be ready to rethink our assumptions so that we are not addressing yesterday's challenges, but tomorrow's.

The 2015 ACT Annual Report describes our progress during the past fiscal year, as it should, but it also honors the vision of the people who preceded us, and whose wisdom continues to inform the work we are privileged to perform today.



ACT Annual Report, 1959–1960

## Jean Paul Mather (1960)

In making this report on the first year of a college entrance testing program that has already become an important part of American education, I am keenly aware of the fact that I played no role in the program for most of that year.

Some 125,604 young men and women took the battery of ACT tests in 1959–60 as a result of the requirements or recommendations of 368 colleges and universities in 19 states.



## ACT (2015)

More than 1.9 million members of the US high school Class of 2015 took the ACT® test—approximately 59 percent of all high school graduates in the United States.

For the eleventh straight year, a record number of students took the ACT, and as has been the case for the past four years, the ACT is now the leading college readiness assessment in the United States.

The ACT National—the ACT test that is generally administered on a Saturday morning—has shown significant growth, with areas of the country that only a decade ago were unfamiliar with the ACT now preferring it.

Meanwhile, the State and District testing program has also continued to rapidly expand, with partnerships in 20 states during the 2014–2015 academic year providing the ACT test at no cost to their students, an exceptional student opportunity that is also being offered in many districts across the country.

And, on March 3, 2015—a Tuesday—ACT had the single largest testing day in its history, with more than 700,000 students taking the ACT.

Across the ACT National, and the ACT State and District testing programs, as well as students who tested internationally, ACT scores were sent to more than 4,300 colleges and universities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.



## ACT (2015)

During its second year, ACT Aspire® was administered more than 5.4 million times to students in grades 3 through early high school.

ACT Aspire offers summative and periodic testing and, like the ACT, assesses readiness in English, math, reading, and science.

Meanwhile, ACT WorkKeys® continues to be America's leading test of work-related skills, and the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate™ remains its leading work readiness credential. More than three million ACT NCRC® credentials have been issued since the certificate was introduced in 2006.

This past year, 350,000 students participated in state administrations of ACT WorkKeys, and three new states adopted the program for use with their high school students.

ACT Engage® and ACT QualityCore® offered assessments of behavioral skills and course-specific academic skills, respectively, and ACT Profile, a college and career planning community, exceeded 100,000 users.

Across ACT, we have grown from a 1950s-era start-up (and “upstart”) sponsoring a single assessment to an organization with solutions and services that span nearly the full range of a person's life.

### Jean Paul Mather:

It is clear that these correlations will not provide a magic index for infallible predictions. There are dozens of factors which we cannot test.

### Jon Erickson ACT President, retired 2015:

ACT has proposed a multidimensional model of college and career readiness that takes into account much more than just core academic skills. Also included are the student's behavioral skills, career navigational skills, and important abilities like critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving.

Jean Paul Mather (1960)

[The ACT] provides public institutions of higher education and high schools, as well as private institutions, with test scores and statistical data that, when combined with the student's high school record, constitute predictors of academic performance in college that are as reliable as any yet available.



ACT (2015)

Over the past decade, ACT has experienced unprecedented growth in the number of students tested, with statewide partnerships providing a deeper and more representative set of students and scores than a purely self-selected college-going population.

Among the ACT-tested graduates of the Class of 2015, 86 percent aspired to postsecondary education. However, if past years are a guide, fewer than 70 percent actually enrolled.

If the United States were to close this aspirational gap, an additional 325,000 students would start postsecondary studies each year.

In a manner consistent across states, schools, and teachers, ACT score reports provide important information for understanding students' strengths and weaknesses—and invaluable insights about their current interests and postsecondary aspirations.

Even the minority of colleges and universities that call themselves “test optional” find ACT score reports useful in understanding their applicants, which in turn gives them a stronger foundation with which to advise the applicants they hope to enroll.

The broader view of college and career readiness is captured in a 2015 ACT research report titled *Beyond Academics: A Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success*, which notes “Most know of academically talented students who did not persist in college and highly skilled workers who failed in their jobs...It is a mistake to focus only on what is commonly measured when research findings clearly show success in postsecondary environments is related to multiple domains.”

ACT has proposed a multidimensional model of readiness that takes into account behavioral and career navigation skills, and important abilities such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving.

In short, we believe every student who takes the ACT deserves the opportunity to have their passions and potential not only drive their own decisions, but inform those making decisions on their behalf.

## Jean Paul Mather (1960)

In addition ACT reported the scores to the 6,000 different secondary schools represented by the test candidates.



## ACT (2015)

During the past academic year, ACT sent score reports to 28,300 high schools across the United States.

Twenty states chose to offer their high school students a free administration of the ACT during the 2014–2015 academic year. Those states recognize the ACT not only enhances student opportunities, but helps them better understand how their state systems are performing as a whole.

Unlike some of its alternatives, the ACT has real value for students, which makes it more likely they will be motivated to demonstrate what they can do. That means states, districts, and schools are more likely to receive accurate views of how well their students are performing.

Similarly, ACT WorkKeys can open the door to real-world employment for students (and, of course, adults) seeking career opportunities. Nine states offered ACT WorkKeys for all of their students during the 2014–2015 school year, with three more states doing so this year.

Across all of our programs, contracts with states and districts resulted in nearly \$100 million in revenue, a gratifying investment in the young people these states and districts serve.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Formation of the program and plans for 1959–60 testing were formally announced on September 8, and the first 75,000 students were tested on November 7.

### ACT (2015)

Since 2002, ACT has grown from zero students participating in the ACT State and District testing program to more than 1.1 million.

In 2014–2015, more than 13,000 students took the ACT online, earning college-reportable scores, in addition to the millions who are now testing online through the ACT Aspire, ACT Engage, ACT QualityCore, and ACT WorkKeys programs.





## Jean Paul Mather (1960)

In less than a year's time, the ACT program, with its potential for great service in a time of revolutionary change, had become a reality.

The inauguration of the American College Testing Program comes at a time when education in the United States is experiencing not one but several revolutions.



### Jean Paul Mather:

At this writing, arrangements are being made for the operation of test centers in all states. A full list of testing sites will be published before the examinations are given.

## ACT (2015)

Public schools in the United States are now majority minority, with no single ethnicity dominating the demographic profile.

As a result, the members of each group must increasingly learn and live with people unlike themselves—a lifelong skill that not only makes a difference inside the United States, but in a world in which no country or culture embodies more than a small slice of the total population.

Technologically, education is being affected by “1:1” and “one-to-the-world” initiatives that put a computer on each student’s lap (in addition to the “computer” many already have in their pockets).

Students may attend resource-poor schools, but with Wi-Fi, they have access to more information than their parents would have enjoyed had they camped out in the Library of Congress a generation ago.

From an assessment perspective, traditional “summative” tests are being supplemented by interim, periodic, and formative assessments that are more frequent, but often considered to be of lower stakes.

An array of approaches is essential given that many disadvantaged students enter kindergarten behind in early reading and math skills, oral language development, vocabulary, and general knowledge. Gaps also exist in social behaviors such as listening, following instructions, and resolving conflicts.

Learning is cumulative, with one lesson building on another, and every deficit that is allowed to persist makes it all the more difficult to master the next set of required skills.

There are several revolutions under way, and each requires our attention.

For a generation and longer, ACT has offered services in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, all US territories, and more than 125 countries around the world.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

These changes are bound to be accompanied by revolutions in techniques, revolutions in the very structure of our educational complex.

No doctor of 1960 insists on using the medical tools and techniques of 1910. No physicist claims that Newtonian mechanics explain the universe.

Education as well will not go on in the same old way.

### ACT (2015)

Reflecting the educational revolution, there are increasing numbers of “flipped” classrooms in which students watch lectures on their computers at home, and then do their “homework” at school with the now freed-up teacher ready to provide personalized assistance just a few steps away.

Charter schools, magnet schools, home schooling, immersion programs, competency-based grading systems, online student exchanges, badges, micro-credentials, and a host of other learning options once again make this a time of “revolutions in the very structure of our educational complex.”

It is unclear which models will take hold, which will fall by the wayside—and which innovative models have yet to be introduced, or even imagined.

What is clear is that the pace of the revolution will not subside, and that “Education... will not go on in the same old way.”



## Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Long-established practices and existing structures, maintained rigidly over the years, are being questioned as they have never been questioned before.

We are discovering that some of the techniques long used are becoming excessively expensive and unproductive. At the same time both teachers and students are demanding higher standards and more effective techniques.



## ACT (2015)

*The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015* showed, once again, the performance of US students is not where it needs to be.

- During the 2014–2015 school year 31 percent of graduates tested met none of the four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in English, mathematics, reading, or science, suggesting they are likely to struggle after high school.  
ACT research suggests fewer than 20 percent of students reaching none of the benchmarks are likely to earn a two- or four-year college degree. This translates to nearly 500,000 students among this group of students alone.
- Readiness remains weakest among underserved groups. African American, American Indian, Hispanic, and native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students trail their white and Asian peers.
- Similar gaps exist among potential first-generation college students. More than 300,000 students from the Class of 2014 were potential first-generation students, and 94 percent aspired to a postsecondary degree—but only 17 percent met at least three ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, leaving the remainder at risk for struggling in their studies after they finished high school.
- Based on previous research, ACT projects only 69 percent of the US high school Class of 2015 will enroll in a postsecondary institution.

This means more than 325,000 students who may have had college aspirations will not attend a two- or four-year college in the fall following their high school graduations.

Jean Paul Mather (1960)

What today's college graduate learned in sixteen years, his children will learn better in fourteen.

This is not an idle dream; it can be substantiated from the experiences of the past half century.

Nor is it an incidental luxury; it is an absolute necessity if the individual is to have any hope of assimilating even a significant fraction of the exploding accumulation of new knowledge and new ideas.

Does the structure of four years of high school, followed by four years of college, followed by three or more years of graduate school, represent the wisdom of experience or merely the rigidity of long tradition?

Jean Paul Mather:

The tests themselves are fallible; some students are better “test takers” than others; some are nervous, indeed sometimes the most able are also the most nervous.

ACT (2015)

Today's students are not learning in 14 years what yesterday's students learned in 16.

In fact, most are not learning in 12 years what they ought to have learned in 12.

According to *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015*, 86 percent of high school graduates aspire to postsecondary education, but only 40 percent of students taking the ACT met at least three of four college readiness benchmarks.

That's a 46 percent gap between aspiration and preparation.



Ever-fewer educational and economic institutions reflect “the rigidity of long tradition.”

High school students increasingly take “articulated” classes at local community colleges, and college students often participate in internships early in their college careers.

As such, historic divisions in the kindergarten-to-career progression are viewed less as discrete components, and more as integrated elements of a seamless whole.

Jon Erickson:

ACT firmly believes more information is always better than less when making critical decisions that affect an individual's future.

That's just logical.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Is the scheme of a teacher with thirty pupils in a classroom the basis of a pattern that represents optimum use of teaching resources in all types or areas of education?



### ACT (2015)

For 150 years following Horace Mann's 1843 visit to Germany, American students were organized into cohorts—grade-level classes based on their births within the same 12-month span.

This “assembly line” model resulted in millions of students receiving consistent educations, but a calendar-based curriculum is increasingly viewed as insufficient to address the demands of an ever-evolving global economy.

Instead of assuming all students in a classroom are literally “on the same page” in their studies, technology is increasingly making it possible to measure shorter-term student progress.

Periodic assessments, like those found in ACT Aspire, can supply educators with timely and instructionally valuable data that can be used for adapting instruction. Their administration during the learning process, not after, allows time for intervention with struggling students or for enrichment for students who are excelling.

Children are not interchangeable. We would be hurt, and even angry, if people claimed they were.

Periodic assessments don't accept the premise of student uniformity. Instead, they identify what each student knows and doesn't know and, in doing so, provide data for more targeted and responsive programs of instruction.

Horace Mann might be surprised with this new direction in American education.

Jean Paul Mather would not be.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Particular tests and their related services are perishable commodities. What was appropriate yesterday may no longer be useful today.

We have already begun, therefore, to carry on continuing research with the cooperation of participating institutions and individuals and help provide the service that will be so necessary for the education of the future.



### ACT (2015)

ACT is committed to introducing regular and responsible enhancements that keep our products relevant while avoiding reinventions that create unnecessary risk.

Many aspects of our programs simply don't need fixing. For example, the familiar 1–36 scoring scale that we use for the ACT won't change. Period.

That stability makes our scores easier to understand and act upon than some of our market alternatives.

While our foundations are solid, we are also pleased to regularly introduce enhancements to make our products even more meaningful.

During the past year, we completed preparations for new elements now found on our ACT score reports. These include:

- A STEM score that represents overall performance on the math and science portions of the exam (the ACT remains the only national college admission exam to measure science skills), and a
- Progress Toward Career Readiness Indicator that provides an indicator of future performance on the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate, which certifies foundational work skills important for job success.

In addition to the changes being introduced today, we are always thinking about tomorrow.

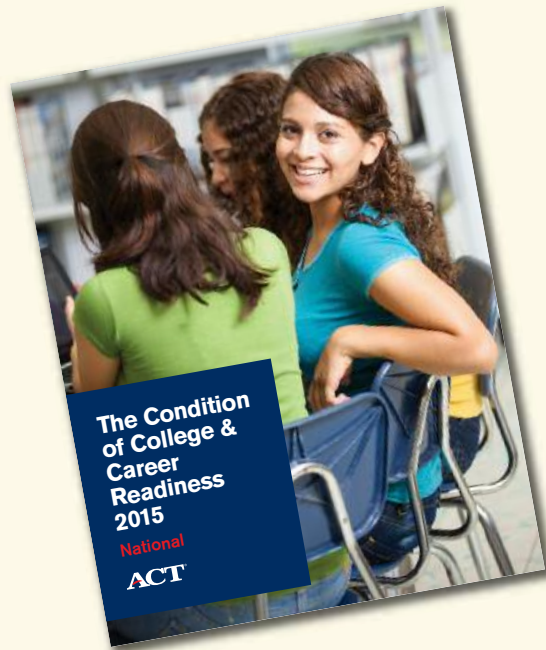
The intervals in which to innovate—the fleeting interludes between ideas and implementation—can be breathtakingly brief.

Through our culture of innovation, and the implementation of processes and relationships to support it, we are confident we will be at the forefront when the next disruptive technology emerges.

We are equally committed to ensuring that when those innovations reach our customers, they will be right.

## Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Dr. Lindquist agreed to bring his great stature and experience as an educational testing authority to the program.



## ACT (2015)

An important and unique benefit of using ACT assessments is that, unlike many assessments that rely solely on expert opinion, ACT assessments are designed using empirical research.

The ACT National Curriculum Survey<sup>®</sup>, conducted every three to four years since 1976, is the only survey of its kind in the United States. ACT first identifies what postsecondary faculty expect of their incoming students, and compares those expectations to what is really happening in elementary, middle, and high schools. ACT uses these comparisons to determine the skills and knowledge that should be measured on ACT assessments and to guide its test blueprints.

ACT research also helps the United States better understand the triumphs and challenges that exist in its classrooms.

The annual *Condition of College & Career Readiness* report provides important data to increase understanding and inform decisions at the national and state levels. Other reports provide detailed examinations of specific groups of students, ranging from the traditional demographic populations to students facing potential challenges as a result of their low-income or first-generation status.

Our research is not intended to live on a library shelf, but to have an impact in the real world. We have enlisted partners with whom we work to help people interpret and understand our findings, including Excelencia in Education, the United Negro College Fund, and the Council for Opportunity in Education, among others.

In addition to informing today's work, ACT research is also building a foundation for tomorrow's tests. The hard work that goes into reports such as *Beyond Academics: A Holistic Approach for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success* will no doubt be represented in educational activities and policy recommendations that will help shape classrooms and companies for a generation to come.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

The bright youngsters from underprivileged homes who now fail to finish high school or who finish in courses that provide inadequate preparation for college will be identified and informed that they can go to college and that financial aid may be available. They will receive the kind of guidance and counseling that will help them raise their sights and prepare for higher education



### ACT (2015)

During the 2014–2015 school year, ACT provided fee waivers valued at \$35.7 million to more than 700,000 students.

This opportunity to take the ACT at no cost to the student is consistent with ACT's nonprofit mission, and represents a significant proportion of ACT's annual revenue.

In December 2014, ACT participated in the White House College Opportunity Day of Action, at which we announced three programs to assist underserved students.

#### ■ **Dialing for Scholars**

ACT-registered students with fee waivers are twice as likely as other students to not show up on test day.

“Dialing for Scholars” reaches out to underserved students via phone, text, or email before ACT National test dates to better prepare them for testing.

ACT is also providing post-test follow up to help students understand their score reports and prepare them for the college admission process.

Increasing the test-taking rate of students with fee waivers by 10 percent will likely result in 10,000 additional underserved students enrolling in postsecondary education each year.

#### ■ **Get Your Name in the Game**

The ACT Educational Opportunity Service (EOS) reaches out to students with information about opportunities that may be of interest.

“Get Your Name in the Game” offers colleges and scholarship agencies access to the names of underserved students who participate in EOS.

In its first few months, more than 300 institutions downloaded 13.6 million records. The initiative is expected to benefit as many as 725,000 students each year.

#### ■ **Advisory Council of Counselors**

ACT Profile is a free college and career planning community.

The Advisory Council of Counselors is working with ACT to help guide the development of ACT Profile.

ACT's goal is to reach millions of students and their counselors, with a particular focus on underserved students.



### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

We are not an underdeveloped country, yet we sometimes behave as if we were, as if we could not afford the capital investment and the operating costs necessary to develop the raw material of human ability.

The one fact of supreme importance is that the ACT program is now firmly established as part of the bone and sinew of American education itself.

It stands for freedom of opportunity in education and is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of an educational system that is already without parallel in any other nation.

In a time of accelerating change that called the ACT program into being, may it help lead through the confusion.

#### Jean Paul Mather:

...Neither ACT nor any other battery can measure motivation, social or personal adjustment to new situations, the influence of family or girlfriends, competing interests, and many other factors.

### ACT (2015)

As a research-based nonprofit organization, ACT is committed to identifying solutions that are informed by data and that reinforce the need for students to meet appropriate benchmarks at every point along the continuum from kindergarten through career.

As part of this commitment, this past year we released **ACT Policy Platforms** containing extensive recommendations in three areas: K–12 education, postsecondary education, and workforce development.

Among its recommendations, ACT urges federal, state, and local policymakers to take specific steps to improve educational outcomes:

- **Promote system alignment.** Encourage education system alignment so that all components of the system—standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments—work together to achieve desired goals.
- **Support and develop teachers.** Develop robust teacher evaluation systems based on student growth, strengthen teacher education and professional development programs, and increase teacher pay.
- **Safeguard and use data responsibly.** Ensure that student data are used in a way that balances the potential to help students improve while ensuring their privacy.

#### Wayne Camara ACT Senior Vice President, Research:

Testing organizations and test users need to state clearly what a given test can and cannot do. We need to remind policymakers of the proper and limited use of tests.

We need to be modest in our stated purposes, and provide data and evidence to back up every claim.

### Jean Paul Mather (1960)

Children who are not educated, are not educated forever. The resources of ability do not lie in the ground waiting to be tapped. They are lost. There is an irrevocable finality to it.



### ACT (2015)

Each day a child falls behind is a day wasted. Each skill an adult lacks is opportunity, and often earnings, lost.

Multiply these omissions by millions, year after year, and the stakes grow ever higher, and the need to change becomes ever more obvious and immediate.

Jean Paul Mather was correct. Children who are not educated are not educated forever. The resources of ability do not lie in the ground waiting to be tapped. They are lost. There is an irrevocable finality to it.

In a similar vein, jobs in the US economy are changing. Workers need additional education in part because many jobs now require different or upgraded skills.

The “resources of ability” Mather described must not be lost.

It is our shared responsibility to bring these resources to the surface, and to help them grow.

And as we go forward, we will continue to act in the spirit of Jean Paul Mather, and countless others who have worked tirelessly to establish ACT as “part of the bone and sinew” of American education and workplace success.

**act** 2015  
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