

ACT Report Reveals Iowa and Nationwide Student STEM Interests

Written by Office of the Governor of the State of Iowa
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(February 5, 2014; Cedar Falls, Iowa) A new report from ACT provides valuable information to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education policy and programming leaders regarding the intentions of students to pursue STEM studies and careers. Of Iowa's 22,377 ACT test-takers in 2013 (66% of all high school graduates), almost half (49%) have an interest in a STEM major or occupation, an increase of 2.2% since 2009. But translating interest into the reality of a STEM degree presents Iowans with a great challenge.

The ACT national and state reports, *The Condition of STEM*, examine the expressed and measured interests of high school graduates in the class of 2013 who took the ACT college readiness exam. Expressed interest is when students say they intend to pursue a particular major or occupation. Measured interest, in contrast, is derived from students' responses to the ACT Interest Inventory, a battery of questions that measures preferences for different types of work tasks.

"The Condition of STEM report revealed that positive progress is being made in Iowa, especially when compared to similar states. Having a successful STEM strategy in Iowa is critical for helping young Iowans understand the breadth of opportunities that await them following graduation," said Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds who co-chairs the Governor's STEM Advisory Council. "Governor Branstad and I, along with the Governor's STEM Advisory Council, are committed to offering a quality, innovative education in our schools ensuring Iowa students are fully prepared for the careers of tomorrow."

Of Iowa's 11,041 STEM-interested graduates, 4,153 had both expressed and measured interest in STEM, which places Iowa in the top ten states of comparable test-taking populations for STEM interest. By gender and ethnicity though, Iowa has an opportunity to gain ground. Female interest in STEM is slightly lower than male at 46.2% though gain in interest since 2009 outpaces male gains 2.8% to 1.5%. Interest among African-American is at 42.6% and for

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Native Americans 40.4% - both slight declines since 2009. For Hispanic students interest has remained comparable to that of whites at 48.8%.

"Iowa's workforce solutions depend on an inspired pipeline of home-grown talent," said Vermeer CEO and STEM Council co-chair Mary Andringa. "This ACT report is a valuable snapshot but even more priceless a longitudinal indicator for Iowa moving forward. Every young Iowa, regardless of geography, demography, ethnicity, or economy, deserves a top-quality STEM education leading to fulfilling careers and high quality lives right here within our borders."

A number of national reports have pointed to a need for more STEM workers. A recent report from the Bayer Corporation's Facts of Science Education survey suggests Fortune 1000 companies are struggling to fill STEM positions due to a shortage of qualified candidates. The STEM job outlook is strong, and STEM occupations tend to be high-paying, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the recently released U.S. News 100 Best Jobs of 2014, more than half of the top 50 jobs are STEM-related. Iowa's Workforce Development office projects STEM occupations to be high wage and high growth for the foreseeable future.

"ACT has delivered another great product to education leaders across the country. This report is an unprecedented window into the intentions and probabilities of our graduates" said Jeff Weld, executive director of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council. "Aligned as they may or may not be, the expressed and measured interest of STEM prospects to post-secondary study is a unique and vital indicator that every state (and the nation as a whole) needs to track if we are to deliver the STEM promise to our youth."

The Condition of STEM reports for the nation and for each state can be accessed for free on ACT's website at: www.act.org/stemcondition .

About the Governor's STEM Advisory Council: Formed in 2011, the Council is a 46-member, public-private partnership dedicated to building a strong STEM education foundation for all Iowans. For more information, go to IowaSTEM.gov