

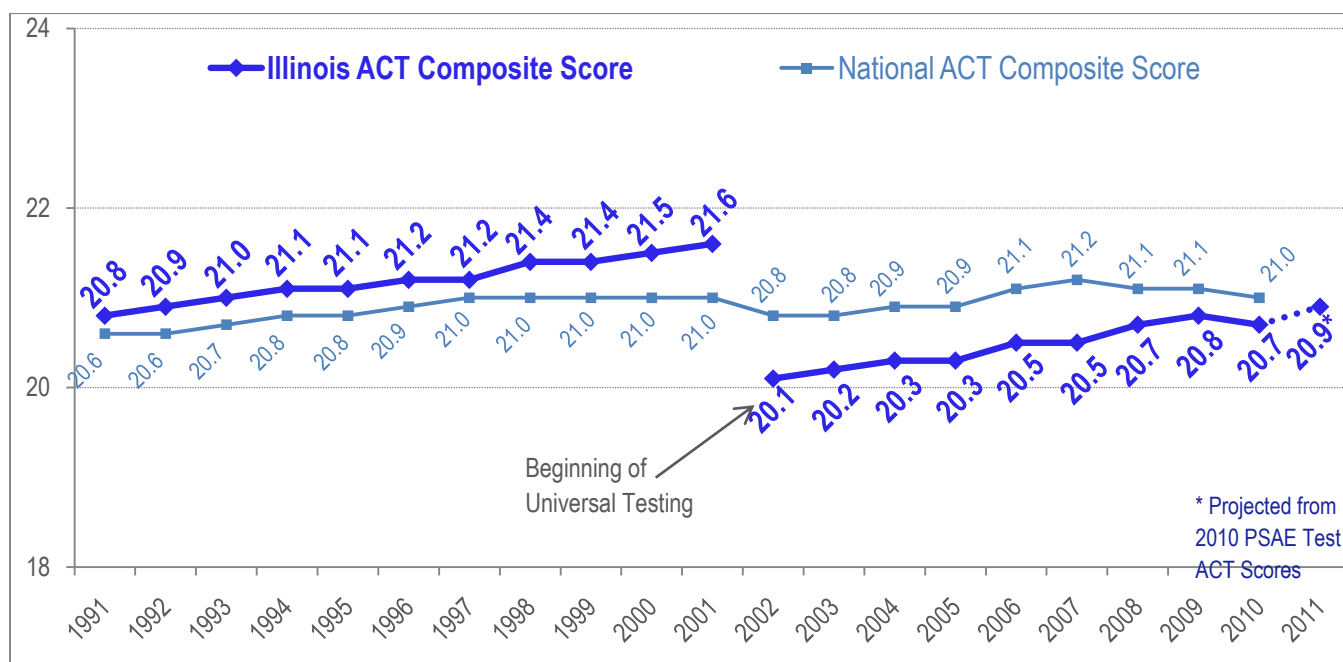
ACT Performance in Illinois for the Past Twenty Years: A History of Consistent Improvement

There have been many measures of student academic performance in Illinois. However, since it has a decades-long track record of reliability and validity across the country, is based on a very meaningful set of academic standards, is now given to almost all high school students in Illinois, and is taken seriously by both students and educators, **the ACT currently is the best overall measure of student academic performance in Illinois**. Additionally, while ACT tests are taken by high schools students, the tests also reflect the efforts of the K-8 schools in preparing the students for high school.

The graph below depicts overall Illinois Final ACT Report composite score performance changes over the past 20 years, using the Class of 1991 as the baseline. The large drop in Illinois scores between the Classes of 2001 and 2002 was due to the change to universal testing, when ACT testing levels in Illinois changed from 71% of the graduates to 99%. Most of these new test-takers are Illinois' lowest performing students. With such a greatly different pool of students, there is no way to compare performance between the Classes of 2001 and 2002.

For the other nineteen year-long time periods, Illinois ACT performance has increased in 13 of them, counting the projected growth for the Class of 2011. Performance stayed the same in five years. In only one year did the performance decline, and PSAE ACT data for the Class of 2011 show a rebound to an even higher level from the slight Class of 2010 dip.

ACT Performance in Illinois for the Past Twenty Years by Graduating Class



For the Classes of 1991 through 2001, the era of college-bound only testing, the composite scores in Illinois went up .8, double the .4 increase for the national average. During the universal testing years, ACT performance increased .6 points from the Class of 2002 to the Class of 2010, triple the .2 increase for the national average. Another .2 increase is expected for the Illinois Class of 2011, due to the increase in Prairie State Achievement Examination ACT performance. In fact, the universal testing of Class of 2011 students is expected to produce higher average scores than for the college-bound-only tested Class of 1991, an accomplishment that is a great credit to Illinois schools.

Other factors can affect score trends. The school report card shows that the free/reduced lunch percentage in Illinois has increased from 37.5% for Class of 2002 to 45.4% for Class of 2010. Additionally, Illinois began testing English Language Learner (ELL) students with the ACT for the Class of 2009 (2008 PSAE testing). Since low income and ELL students tend to be more at-risk academically, this would lead us to expect a decline in scores for that period. Despite this increase in traditionally lower scoring students, overall scores have increased.

ACT test scores currently are the best measure of overall academic performance in Illinois' schools and districts. **Illinois' improvement on the ACT in the past 20 years has been both consistent and substantial overall.** Also, despite the fact that demographic changes would have predicted lower Illinois ACT performance in recent years, Illinois performance has kept increasing at a rate much higher than for the nation. While Illinois schools continue to have plenty of room for improvement, this growth shows that they have taken the challenge of school improvement seriously, and met it successfully.