

The Future Workforce of Alabama

Alabama's labor force and economy are strengthened when the state's high school graduates are prepared for college and are interested in pursuing available jobs in Alabama. Academic preparation is critical, given that many of the projected high growth job openings in Alabama will require a 2-year college degree or more. In Alabama, five of the expected highest growth career fields will be education, management, health care, computer specialties, and community services. Do Alabama's future workers have the necessary skills to fill positions in these high-growth careers? Are Alabama's future workers interested in jobs in these fields?

Using 2008 ACT results for 24,295 Alabama high school graduates with career interest information, and 2004-2014 Alabama state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

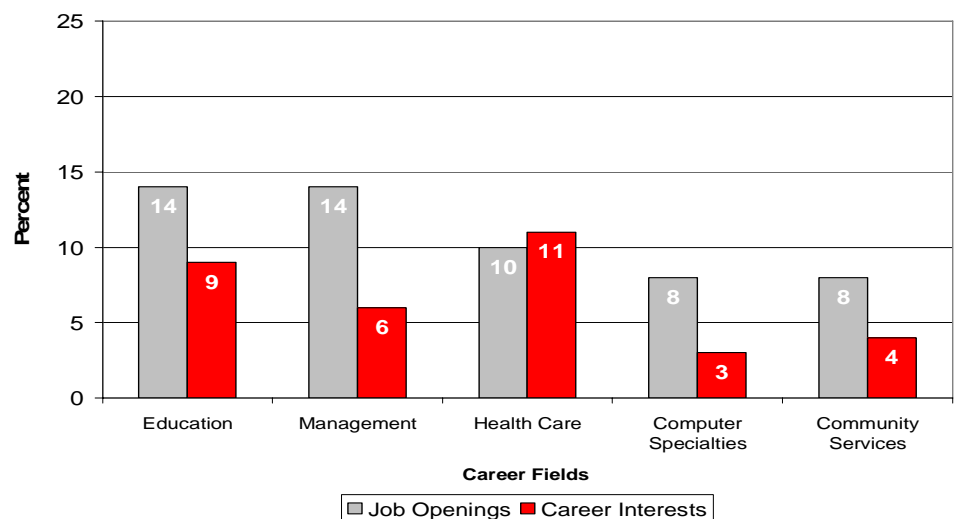
- There is some interest among Alabama high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Alabama students expressing interest in these high-growth career fields, nearly two-thirds are ready for first-year college English courses, while less than one-half are prepared for college-level social science courses.
- Of Alabama students expressing interest in these high-growth career fields, less than one-third are ready for college-level math or science courses.

Alabama educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Alabama career fields.

Students' Interests

- Gaps between expected jobs and interested students are apparent for careers in education (secondary teachers, administrators, etc.), management (convention planners, hotel/restaurant managers, etc.), computer specialties (computer programmers, database administrators, etc.), and community services (social workers, school counselors, etc.), with more jobs expected than students interested in jobs in these fields (Figure 1). Alabama may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

Figure 1: Projected Annual Job Openings and Alabama High School Students' Interests in High Growth Alabama Career Fields^{1,2}



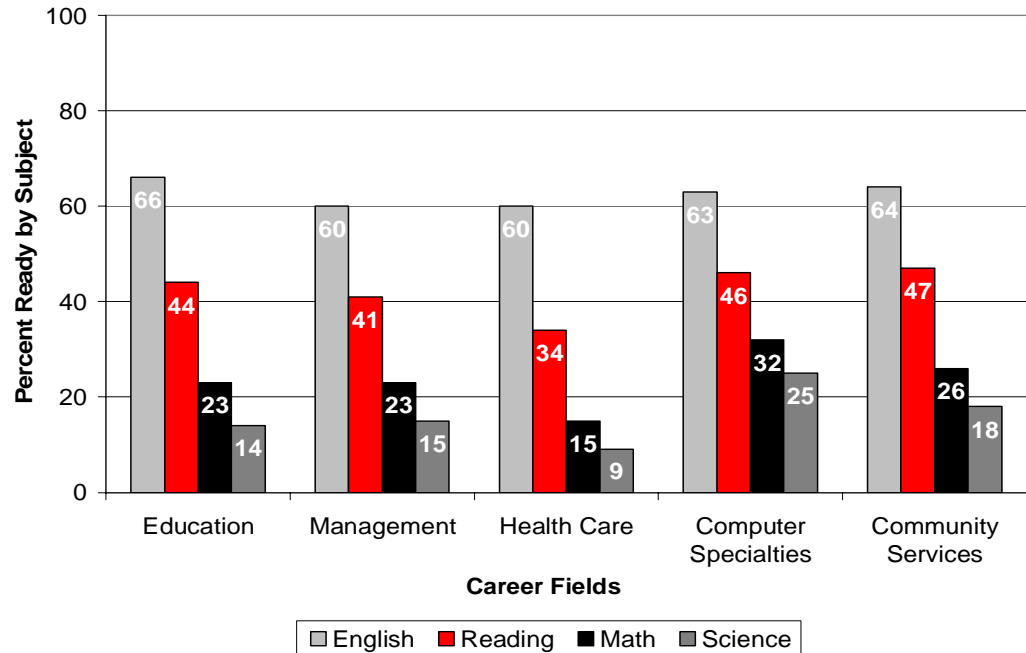
¹State projections 2004-2014 provided by Alabama Department of Industrial Relations.

²Based on 2008 ACT-tested Alabama students ($n = 24,295$) with valid career information.

- There are slightly more students interested in the health care field (nurses, occupational therapists, etc.) than jobs that will be available in this field, but many of

these students are not ready to meet or exceed one or more of ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, mathematics, or science, as shown in Figure 2. Students who are interested and college ready are more likely to be successful in the coursework needed to enter this high-growth career field.

Figure 2: ACT College Readiness Benchmark Performance of Alabama High School Students Interested in High Growth Alabama Career Fields by Subject³



³Based on 2008 ACT-tested Alabama students ($n = 24,295$) with valid subject scores and career information.

Alabama educators should continue to encourage their students to achieve the highest level of preparation for college, in order to meet Alabama Workforce demands.

Students' Skills

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Alabama, nearly two-thirds of students are prepared for first-year college coursework in English for the five high-growth career fields. Fewer students interested in these high-growth fields are prepared to succeed in college-level social science courses (indicated by ACT Reading Benchmark), with students pursuing health care careers being the least prepared and students pursuing community services careers being the most prepared.
- Approximately one-third of students wanting to enter computer specialties are ready for college-level math courses, while one-quarter are ready for college-level science. Less than one-quarter of students pursuing careers in education, management, and health care are ready for college-level math or science.
- Overall, the pattern of readiness for college coursework is similar across the five high-growth career fields: Student preparation is highest for English and social sciences, and much lower for math and science. The lower levels of preparation among graduating high school students is alarming, given the high demand for science- and math-intensive careers such as nursing, pharmacy, and teaching.