



The Future Workforce of Arkansas

Arkansas'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 Arkansas. Academic preparation is critical, given that many of the projected high growth job openings in Arkansas will require a 2-year college degree or more. In Arkansas, five of the expected highest growth career fields will be education, management, community services, marketing & sales, and health care. Do Arkansas's future workers have the necessary skills to fill positions in these high-growth careers? Are Arkansas's future workers interested in jobs in these fields?

Using 2008 ACT results for 15,625 Arkansas high school graduates with career interest information, and 2004-2014 Arkansas state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

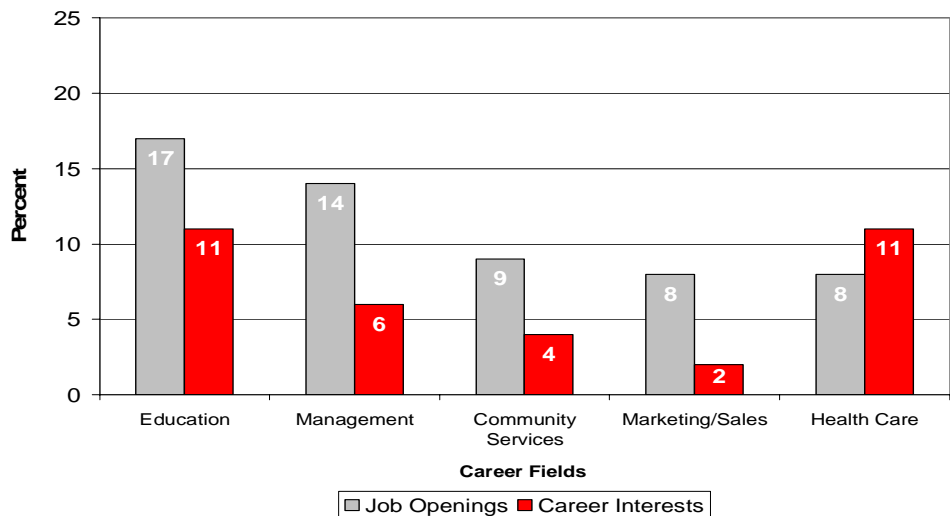
- There is some interest among Arkansas high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Arkansas students expressing interest in these high-growth career fields, nearly two-thirds or more are ready for first-year college English courses, while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

Arkansas educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Arkansas 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.), community services (social workers, school counselors, etc.), and marketing & sales (insurance agents, buyers, etc.), with more jobs expected than students interested in jobs in these fields (Figure 1). Arkansas may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

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

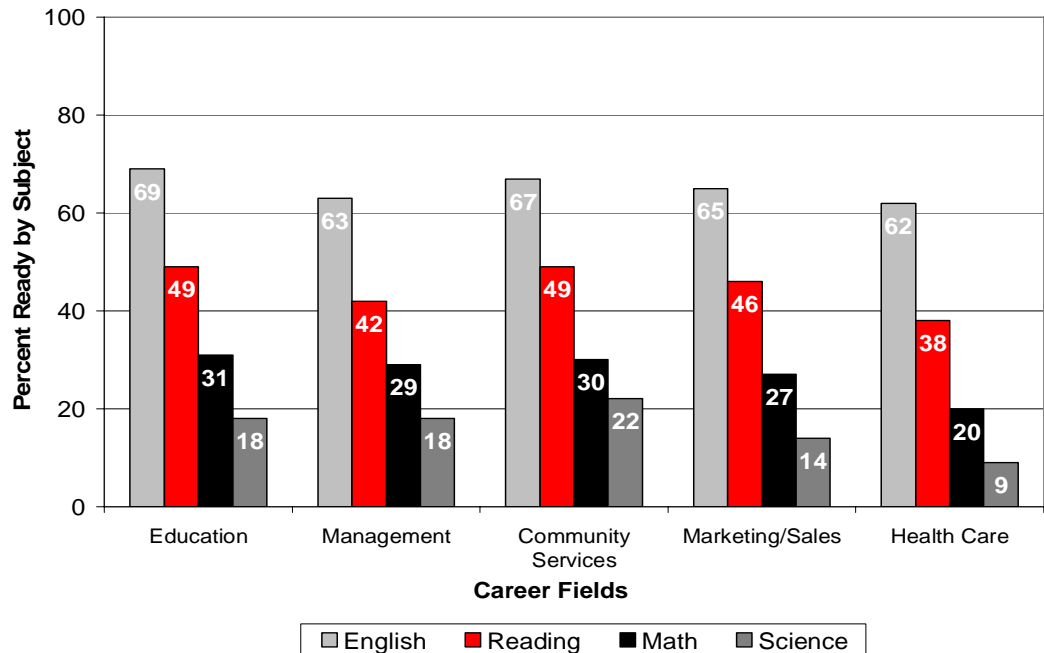


¹State projections 2004-2014 provided by Arkansas Department of Workforce Services.

²Based on 2008 ACT-tested Arkansas students (n = 15,625) with valid career information.

- There are 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 Arkansas High School Students Interested in High Growth Arkansas Career Fields by Subject³



³Based on 2008 ACT-tested Arkansas students ($n = 15,625$) with valid subject scores and career information.

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

Students' Skills

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Arkansas, nearly two-thirds or more 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 education and community services careers being the most prepared.
- Less than one-third of students wanting to enter the five high-growth fields are ready for college-level math courses. Less than one-quarter of students pursuing these fields are ready for college-level 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.