



The Future Workforce of Oklahoma

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

Using 2008 ACT results for 17,836 Oklahoma high school graduates with career interest information, and 2004-2014 Oklahoma state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

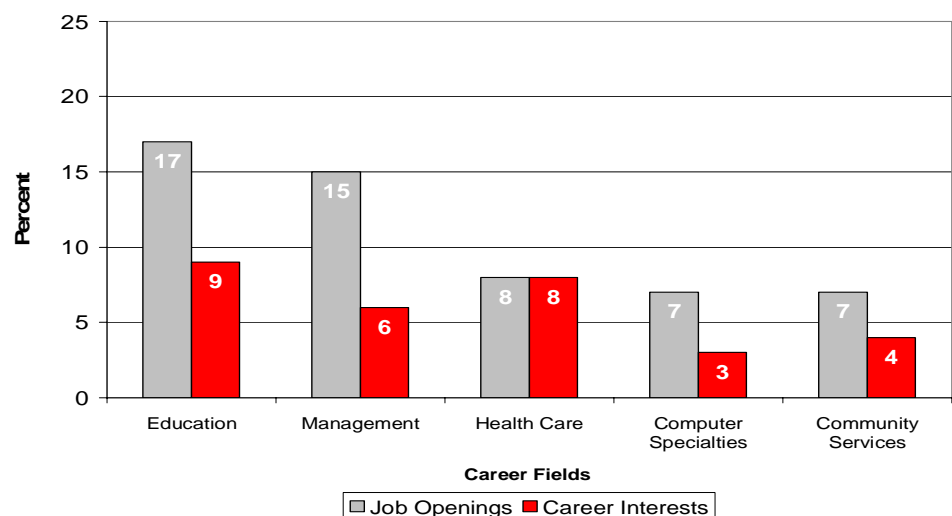
- There is some interest among Oklahoma high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Oklahoma students expressing interest in most of these high-growth career fields, nearly two-thirds or more are ready for first-year college English courses,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

Oklahoma educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Oklahoma 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). Oklahoma may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

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

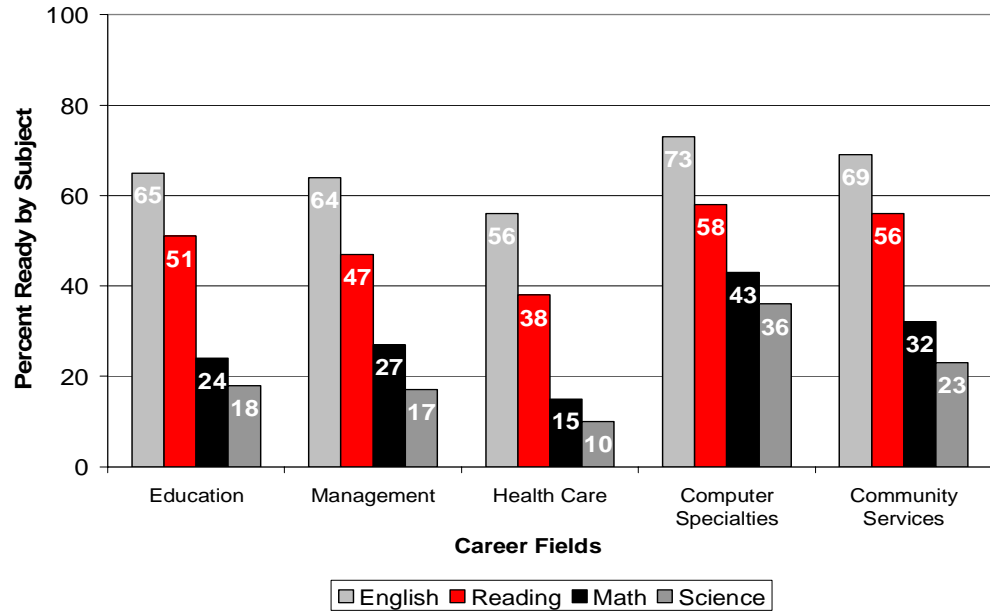


¹State projections 2004-2014 provided by Oklahoma Employment Security Commission.

²Based on 2008 ACT-tested Oklahoma students ($n = 17,836$) with valid career information.

- It appears that there is no gap between students interested in the health care field (nurses, occupational therapists, etc.), and the 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 Oklahoma High School Students Interested in High Growth Oklahoma Career Fields by Subject³



³Based on 2008 ACT-tested Oklahoma students ($n = 17,836$) with valid subject scores and career information.

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

Students' Skills

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Oklahoma, nearly two-thirds or more of students are prepared for first-year college coursework in English for four of 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 computer specialties careers being the most prepared.
- More than one-third of students wanting to enter computer specialties are ready for college-level math or science courses. Approximately one-quarter or less 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.