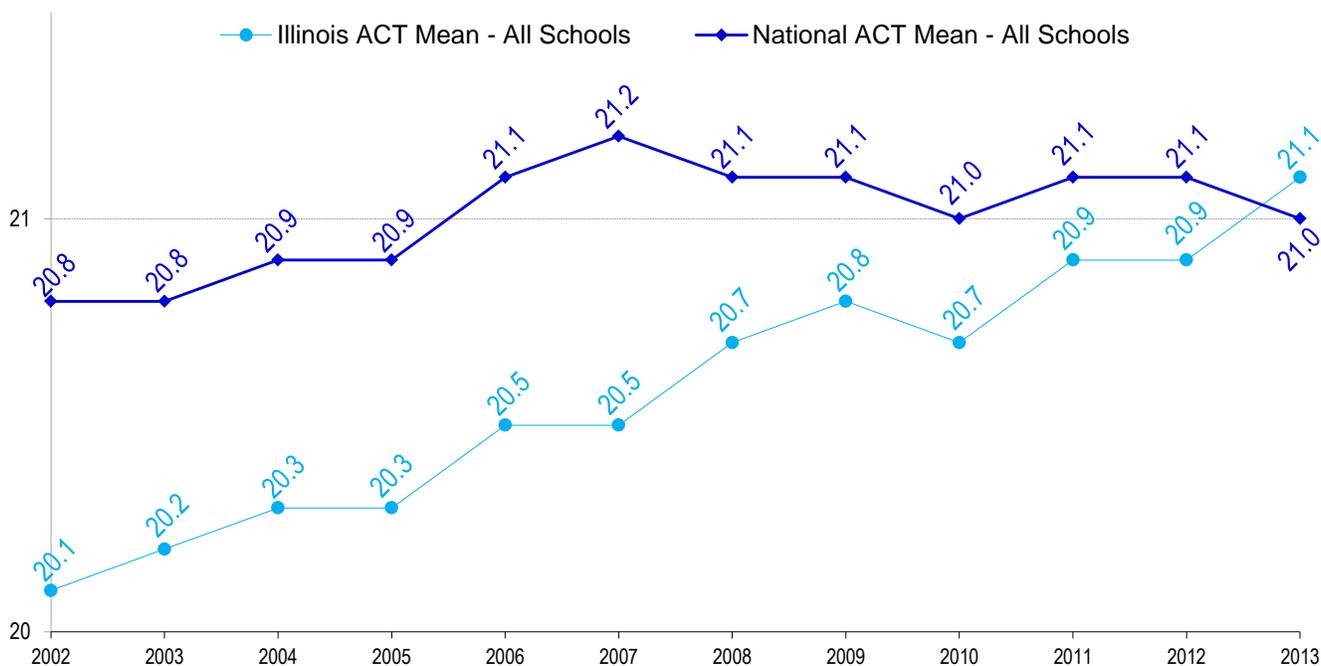


The Improvement of ACT Performance in Illinois since the Beginning of Universal Testing

There have been many measures of student academic performance in Illinois. However, despite its limitations, **the ACT currently is the best overall measure of student academic performance in Illinois.** 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 given to almost all high school students in Illinois, and is taken seriously by both students and educators. 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 Graduating Class ACT Profile Report composite score performance score means since Illinois implemented universal testing with the graduating Class of 2002. Since ACT score compilations excluded extended time-accommodated students until this year, our report's focus on cross-year contrasts necessitated the use of such accommodations-excluded score means (also available in ACT's 2013 report) to be consistent across all years.

ACT Composite Score Performance in Illinois by Graduating Class



ACT performance increased 1.0 points from the Class of 2002 to the Class of 2013, five times the .2 increase for the national average (which, without Illinois' score, would only have been a .13 increase). In fact, the universal testing score mean for Class of 2013 students is equal to or higher than the college-bound-only tested Classes of 1991 through 1995. Additionally, **the scores for Illinois, which include the lowest performing non-college bound students in the state, have now passed the national levels for mostly college-bound-only students.**

Other factors can affect score trends. For example, the percentage of free/reduced lunch students alone explained 70.1% of the variance in Illinois high school composite ACT scores; the higher the free/reduced lunch level, the lower the student performance. The school report cards show that the free/reduced lunch percentage in Illinois has increased from 37.5% for 2002 to 49.9% for 2013, a 33.0% increase. 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 such increases 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 during the universal testing era 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 have achieved substantial success.