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Percent of grads taking ACT grows; scores remain above national average

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota saw a significant increase in the percentage of graduating seniors who took the ACT in 2017, while the state’s average composite score remained above the national average and down slightly from 2016.

South Dakota’s average ACT score for 2017 was 21.8, compared to the national average of 21.0 and last year’s statewide average of 21.9. The composite score reflects sub-scores for English, math, reading and science. In South Dakota, 80 percent of graduates took the ACT in 2017, compared to 76 percent in 2016. Nationally, 60 percent of 2017 graduates took the ACT, and of the six states that tested 70 to 90 percent of their students, South Dakota had the second-highest average ACT composite score.

“Four percent more of the 2017 graduating class took the ACT than their predecessors. That’s good news because it means more students are thinking about an education beyond high school, which is critically important when you consider today’s workforce demands,” said Secretary of Education Dr. Melody Schopp.

According to ACT, 93 percent of South Dakota’s 2017 ACT test-takers indicated that they aspire to pursue postsecondary education. The same was true of 2016 ACT test-takers; however, only 75 percent of those 2016 graduates actually enrolled.

“That’s where we have an opportunity as a state,” Schopp said. “We know we have students who are interested in postsecondary, but they may not know exactly what type of further schooling and career they want to pursue. We can help students by providing them with exposure to, and experiences with, various in-demand careers.”

Efforts such as career and technical education programs, career counseling, dual credit opportunities, and school and business partnerships support this connection between students and the world of work. “At the state level, we are aiming to help school districts to offer and expand these kinds of efforts, so students have a really good understanding of – and ideally some hands-on experiences with – the opportunities available to them once they leave school,” Schopp said.

For more information, visit ACT’s website at act.org.

Average Composite ACT Scores – South Dakota vs. National

Year	South Dakota	National
2013	21.9	20.9
2014	21.9	21.0
2015	21.9	21.0
2016	21.9	20.8
2017	21.8	21.0