

Spring 2015 ACT Aspire Reports and Test Results

Spring 2015 ACT Aspire Data Files and Reports

The following spring 2015 data files and score reports were provided to districts:

- district-level Student Performance Files (SPFs), posted to the ACT Aspire portal July 11,
- Individual Student Reports (ISRs), posted to the ACT Aspire portal July 17,
- District/School Summary Reports, posted to the ACT Aspire portal July 24,
- paper ISRs (1 per student), boxed by school, shipped to DTCs for arrival by July 29, and
- updated district-level SPFs posted to the ACT Aspire portal August 5.

Note: Access to the ACT Aspire portal is scheduled to end on November 1, 2015. Data and reports should be retrieved and downloaded prior to that date.

Under the contract for the spring 2015 test administration, the only paper reports provided for ACT Aspire were single copies of the Individual Student Reports (ISRs). If additional paper copies were needed, districts could make copies of the ISRs received from the contractor; or districts could download and print ISRs from the ACT Aspire portal. Districts could also create student labels from an exported data file.

“Non-Scorable” Writing Tests

In the original data files or SPFs, the column for the Writing scale score contained a number of entries indicated as “non-scorable.” In response to a request from the Department, the ACT Aspire team generated updated SPFs with condition codes to indicate the reasons that Writing responses were considered non-scoreable. The Writing scale score column in the updated SPFs includes a numeric value or one of the following entries: blank = blank answer document; INV = “invalidate/void” gridded on answer document; NE = not English; IL = illegible; OT = off-topic. (The latter three codes appeared only on the updated SPFs.)

ACT Aspire Readiness Levels

For each ACT Aspire test, the number of points earned is counted to obtain a raw score, which is then converted to a three-digit scale score. On the ACT Aspire score reports, scale scores are categorized into one of three performance or readiness levels: *Ready*, *Close*, and *In Need of Support*. A fourth level appears on the data files or SPFs, where the *Ready* range is divided into *Ready* and *Exceeding* categories. The cut-scores associated with the four levels for all ACT Aspire subject tests and each grade level are indicated in the attached table (see page 3 of this document).

For all ACT Aspire subject tests **except** Writing, the four categories used to classify student performance are tied to ACT readiness levels. In general, *Ready* means that a student is on track to reach the readiness benchmark on The ACT exam in that subject—with the ACT readiness benchmark, in turn, defined as being on target for a 50% or higher likelihood of introductory-level college course success. (For grades 3–7, readiness cut-scores are based on extrapolation. For grade 8, the Ready cut score is based on actual test results, through linking with the previous ACT Explore and ACT Plan tests.) *Close* means that the student did not reach the *Ready* criterion, but scored well enough to be within a 95% confidence interval of that criterion. That is, while the student scored below the *Ready* cut-score, his/her score was not far enough below the cut to say with near certainty that the student was not ready. This can be contrasted with the *In Need of Support* category, where students can be described with near certainty as being not ready. Students in the *Exceeding* category, meanwhile, scored substantially above the *Ready* cut-score.

Cut-scores for the ACT Aspire **Writing** test were determined in a different manner. Those cuts were based on the judgments of panels of content experts, rather than on predictions of success on The ACT Writing test. ACT Aspire Writing test scores are rubric driven and based on four domains, with each domain scored on a 1–5 point scale (in grades 3–5) or a 1–6 point scale (in grades 6–8). For all grades, the *Ready* cut-score was set as the scale score that corresponds to two 4s and two 3s on the four domains. A more detailed description of the scoring and scaling of Writing can be found in the ACT Aspire *Summative Assessment Technical Bulletin #2* (pages 79–80): http://www.discoveractaspire.org/pdf/2014_ACT-AspireTechnicalBulletin2.pdf.

Normative Data for ACT Aspire

The attached table (page 3 of this document) also displays normative data associated with the ACT Aspire cut-points for each subject test and grade level. The norms, defined as “the cumulative percent of students scoring at or below a given score in the norm sample,” are listed in the columns headed “PctAB.” While the ACT Aspire norms may appear similar to the national percentile ranks generally reported for norm-referenced tests, they are not identical. The major difference is that the ACT Aspire norms are based on a *user sample* (students tested during a 2013 special study and students tested operationally in 2014) rather than a *nationally representative sample* (students selected to represent the national student population in terms of demographic characteristics). As stated in the ACT Aspire *Summative Assessment Technical Bulletin #2* (page 40), “ACT Aspire norms are national, with a broad representation across the country, but they are not nationally representative norms, since they have not been statistically weighted to more closely mimic the national distribution of demographics.” Characteristics of the ACT Aspire norm group are presented in Chapter 3 of the ACT Aspire *Summative Assessment Technical Bulletin #2*.

As indicated in the attached table, there are some obvious differences in the PctAB values corresponding to the ACT Aspire *Ready* (and other) cut-scores across and within subjects. Across subjects, for example, English appears to be the least rigorous and Writing the most rigorous. Depending on the grade level, a student who meets the minimum criterion for *Ready* on the English test scored as well or better than 31 to 38 percent of students in the norm group (depending on the grade level), while a student at the *Ready* cut-score for Writing scored as well or better than 61 to 89 percent of student in the norm group.

District and School Use of ACT Aspire Results

As with any statewide summative test results, district and school users should keep in mind the limitations of the ACT Aspire results. Test data constitute a single source of information that should be used in conjunction with other relevant information when evaluating educational quality or making decisions about instruction. Furthermore, as noted in the *Interpretive Guide for ACT Aspire Summative Reports* (page 1), “(s)cores are estimates of student knowledge and achievement. The student’s actual achievement could be slightly higher or lower than the reported scores.” More information about the reliability of ACT Aspire tests is provided in Chapter 8 of the ACT Aspire *Summative Assessment Technical Bulletin #2*.

Concerns about reliability and measurement error are magnified when considering the student-level results provided for reporting categories or skill areas within the ACT Aspire subject tests. For the English test, for example, the reporting categories or skill areas include “Production of Writing,” “Knowledge of Language,” and “Conventions of Standard English.” Performance is reported as the number and percentage of points earned out of the total points possible for that skill area, and is illustrated on the ISR in terms of falling within or below the ACT readiness range. In some cases, however, the number of total points for a particular reporting category or skill area is extremely small (e.g., as small as two or three points). Extreme caution is advised in the use of these results.

ACT Aspire Cut-Scores [and Percent At or Below (PctAB)] by Subject and Grade							
Subject	Grade Tested	Close (Low Cut)	Close PctAB	Ready (Benchmark)	Ready PctAB	Exceeding (High Cut)	Exceeding PctAB
Writing	3	420	51	428	89	436	99
	4	420	40	428	87	436	99
	5	420	35	428	78	436	97
	6	420	22	428	61	436	92
	7	420	40	428	81	436	98
	8	420	39	428	81	436	98
English	3	408	8	413	36	418	66
	4	411	9	417	38	423	72
	5	412	7	419	37	426	72
	6	413	10	420	35	427	68
	7	413	10	421	33	429	67
	8	415	10	422	31	429	61
Reading	3	411	48	415	72	419	91
	4	412	36	417	68	422	90
	5	415	40	420	73	425	91
	6	416	35	421	61	426	87
	7	417	38	423	71	429	96
	8	418	32	424	58	430	89
Mathematics	3	409	22	413	58	417	89
	4	411	17	416	65	421	93
	5	412	16	418	64	424	91
	6	414	22	420	63	426	89
	7	416	39	422	71	428	91
	8	419	46	425	72	431	88
Science	3	414	58	418	76	422	91
	4	415	42	420	70	425	90
	5	417	39	422	68	427	92
	6	418	42	423	67	428	89
	7	420	50	425	72	430	88
	8	422	46	427	70	432	88

Sources: *ACT Aspire Technical Bulletin #2*, Table 5.5 (p. 81) and Tables 3.6 through 3.10 (pp. 51–60)

Using the ACT Aspire Cut-Scores, performance is classified into four Readiness Levels based on student scale scores:

1. **Exceeding:** at or above the high cut
2. **Ready:** at or above the benchmark and below the high cut
3. **Close:** at or above the low cut and below the benchmark
4. **In Need of Support:** below the low cut