

August 17, 2011

Newton County School System Announces 2011 ACT Scores

Area	# Tested	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
Alcovy High	196	17.3	18.0	18.4	18.1	18.1
Eastside High	154	20.2 Above state average	19.8	21.0 Above state average	20.4 Above state average	20.5
Newton High	240	16.4	17.7	17.6	17.7	17.5
Sharp Learning Center	1	10.0	13.0	12.0	16.0	13.0
NCSS	591	17.7	18.3	18.8	18.5	18.4
Georgia	42,929	20.1	20.7	20.8	20.3	20.6
Nation	1,623,112	20.6	21.1	21.3	20.9	21.1

The number of high school students taking the ACT has seen a steady increase over the years and 2011 was no exception. A record 591 Newton County School System (NCSS) students took the ACT College Entrance Exam in 2011. Only 365 students took the exam in 2006.

Unlike the SAT, a reasoning test that measures critical thinking skills and assesses how well a student analyzes and solves problems, the ACT is a series of curriculum-based, multiple choice tests that cover content knowledge in four basic skill areas: English (College English Composition), math (College Algebra), reading (College Social Science), and science (College Biology). Students also receive a composite score on the exam, which is scored on a scale from 0 to 36. The ACT also has an optional writing test.

While the state maintained its average scores in English and Mathematics, 20.1 and 20.7 respectively and posted slight decreases in Reading, Science, and the Composite (20.8; 20.3;

20.6), Newton County School System's average scores decreased in all subjects and the composite score. The system's overall composite score of 18.4 was down one half a point over last year's 18.9 average composite score. Data show the individual test scores in each subject area dropped as follows: English down four-tenths; Math down four-tenths; Reading down two-tenths; and Science down eight-tenths. All scores, including the composite, were below the state and national averages in 2011.

According to the official ACT report, 196 Alcovy High School students took the ACT in 2011—13 more than 2010. Average scores in all subjects and the composite dropped as follows in 2011: English minus half of a point; Math minus seven-tenths; Reading minus seven-tenths; Science minus 1.3 points; and the Composite score dropped by eight-tenths of a point. All scores were below the state and national average.

Although scores at Eastside High School did see slight decreases in each subject and the composite, the school still topped the state average in English, Reading and Science and Eastside's composite score was just one-tenth of a point below the state. In addition, Eastside's English and Reading scores were just four-tenths and two-tenths of a point respectively below the national average. The school's Science score was just one half a point below the national average. As for the "college readiness" indicators, Eastside outperformed the state and national average in English (69% college ready vs. the state's 63% and the nation's 66%) and in Reading (53% college ready vs. the state's 48% and the nation's 52%).

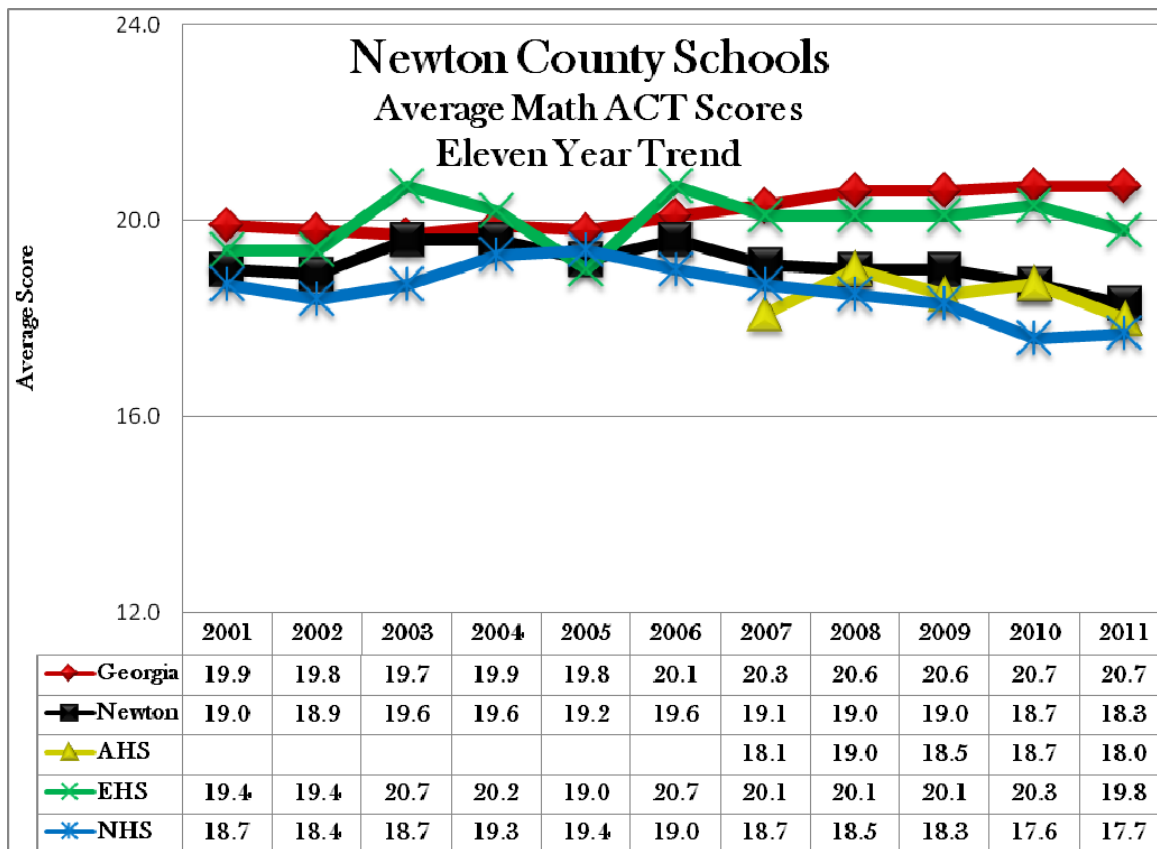
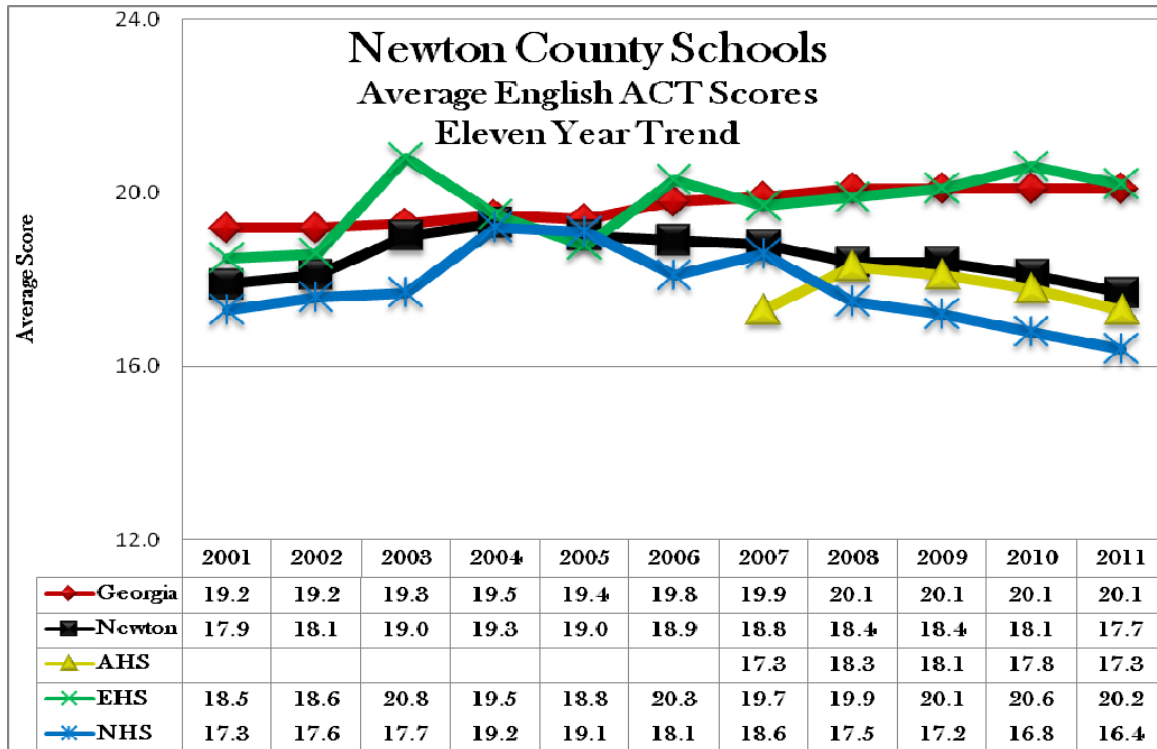
Newton High School's test data indicate that the school's math score did increase by one-tenth of a point, going from 17.6 in 2010 to 17.7 in 2011. Newton High School's average scores in the remaining subjects and the composite declined in 2011 as follows: English four-tenths; Reading minus two-tenths; Science minus six-tenths; and the composite scores decreased by three-tenths of a point.

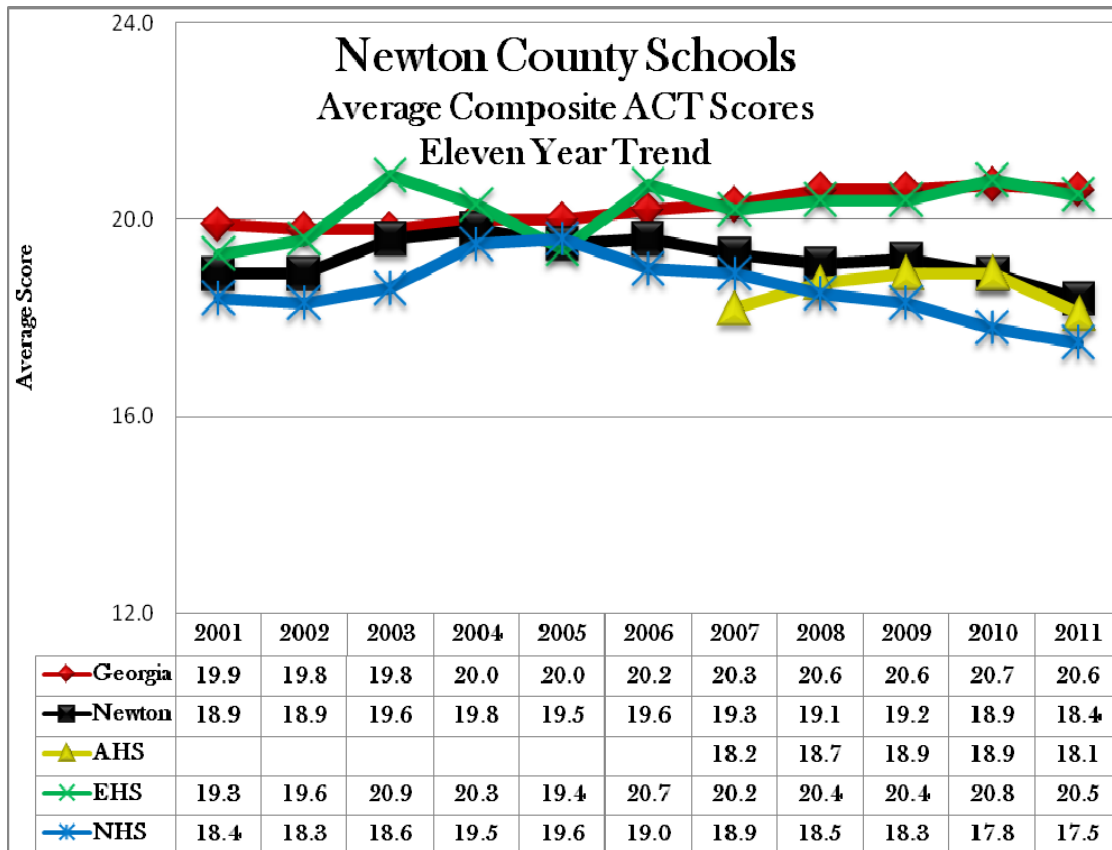
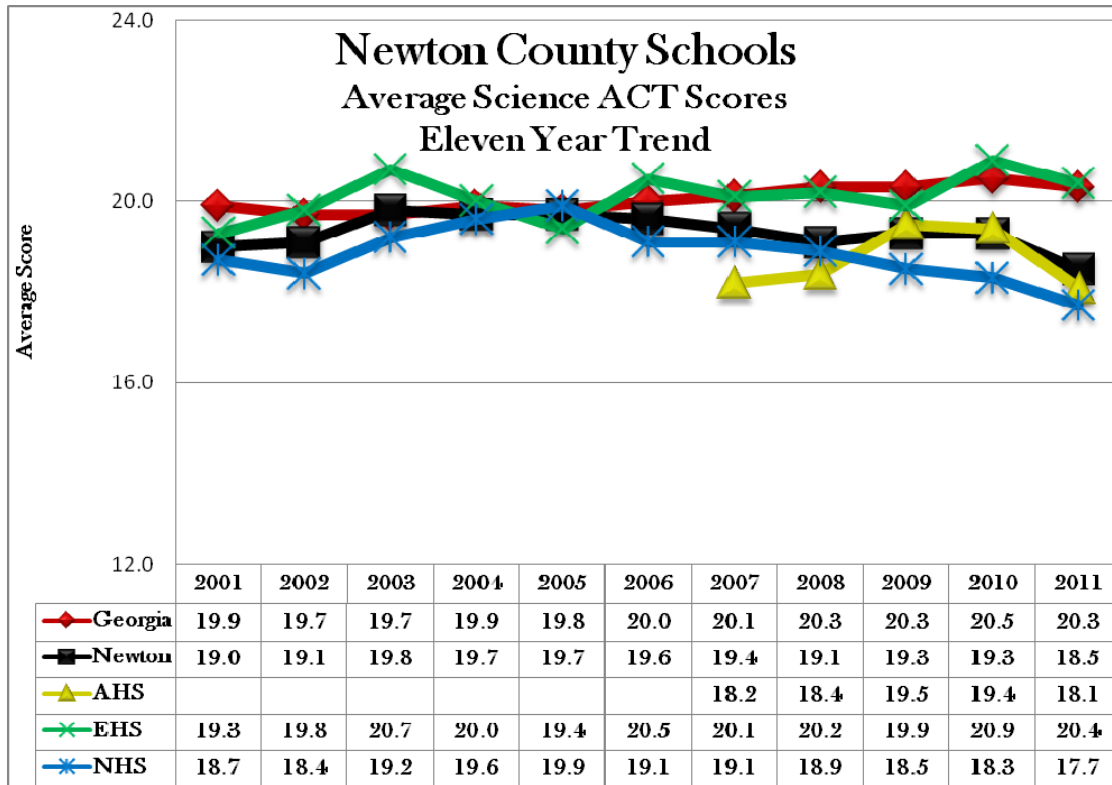
One student at Sharp Learning Center did take the ACT in 2011. The scores were below the state average and included in the district's totals.

Typically, on the ACT, an increase or decrease of just 0.5 is considered "statistically significant."

The following chart shows the 11-year ACT trends for the Newton County School System in English, Math, Reading, Science, and Composite (all four subject areas).

*****Note: Alcovy High School did not open until the 2006-2007 school year; therefore no data is available for 2001 through 2006.***





The following table also shows the 2011 “average” ACT score for the various subgroups in NCSS:

SUBGROUP	NUMBER TESTED	AVERAGE COMPOSITE SCORE 2011	**PERCENT COLLEGE READY IN 4 CORE SUBJECTS
All Students	591	18.4	8%
Black/African American	349	17.2	2%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2	19.5	0%
White	158	21.1	22%
Hispanic/Latino	22	17.8	0%
Asian	6	21.0	33%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0	NA	0%
Two or More Races	29	19.2	21%
No Response	25	17.8	

***A college readiness benchmark score is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about or a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college courses, which include English Composition, Algebra, Social Science and Biology. These scores were empirically derived based on the actual performance of students in college.*

According to Superintendent Gary Mathews, “With just 47 of 591 students deemed ‘college ready,’ we certainly have a ways to go when it comes to improving these college readiness indicators. Current ACT results did not get this way over night. Going forward, as I noted this time last year, there is simply no magic wand or silver bullet when it comes to improving student learning; just ‘smarter’ work. At the school level, ‘smarter’ work must include utilizing our Professional Learning Communities to know who our struggling students are—by name—in order to provide the necessary small-group or individual remediation necessary to increasing a student’s academic success and college readiness. In our high schools, for example, the new ‘Instructional Focus’ period within the new schedule *must* be leveraged to accomplish this. Though prompted by budget reductions, the new Instructional Focus period is most timely. At the district level, it should be evident that with the ACT college readiness benchmark score of 21 in reading, and the NCSS “average” score at 18.8, we could make substantial gains—over time—if our students were more adept at what the ACT calls for: using referring and reasoning skills to:

- determine main ideas
- locate and interpret significant details
- understand sequence of events
- make comparisons
- comprehend cause-effect relationships
- determine the meaning of context-dependent words, phrases, and statements
- draw generalizations
- analyze the author’s or narrator’s voice and method

Reading, and serious reading (and writing) suggestive of the above abilities, is the lynchpin for academic success in K-12 and in college. A look at our NCSS curriculum, for adequate reading (and writing) instruction and reading rigor, is in order. When all is said and done, I anticipate it will take more than just the reading or English teacher to bridge the reading gap now evident. By the time students reach high school, they very much need to be avid readers. If not, when they do enter college, they end up in a remedial track and often end up dropping out of college,” concluded Dr. Mathews.

Most recently, NCSS has taken the following steps to increase student achievement and college readiness among district students:

- For the first time in several years, each high school now offers courses directly related to college preparedness: SAT Prep and Tools for College Success.
- For the first time, NCSS Counselors have developed brochures that articulate—by grade level—how to prepare for college and/or careers beginning as early as the 6th grade. Each of the brochures, 6th through 10th grades, identify the most commonly used SAT words and were distributed to each student for the first time this school year (20 words per each grade level, i.e., 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th).
- For this 2011-12 school year, NCSS has developed common course syllabi (for the first time) and updated curriculum maps which will help ensure all classroom teachers are teaching the state’s curriculum. Monitoring of the delivery of the curriculum by administrators is simplified as they can easily access the curriculum on their desktops for the first time.
- As part of the new NCSS curriculum maps, non-fiction reading and writing is a *required* emphasis. Students will be required to read specific text and respond to an associated writing prompt in all core content areas beginning in the 6th grade.
- For only the second year, all 10th grade students in NCSS will take the PSAT (Preliminary SAT) which will enable the school system to identify curricular strengths and weaknesses and provide students with a norm-referenced standardized testing experience. Additionally, NCSS will use AP Potential, a part of the reporting mechanism of the PSAT, to identify students who have the potential to perform well in more Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- Through the restructuring of the high school day, an “Instructional Focus” period was added. This high school period serves as a “safety-net” for struggling students, but also offers the opportunity for students to participate in enrichment activities. During the Instructional Focus period, NCSS high schools plan to add “advisement” as an integral tool to connect with small groups of students while encouraging them to take courses necessary to assist with their post-secondary plans.

According to Superintendent Mathews, “‘College readiness’ is a very important indicator of school system quality when it comes to companies looking to locate here or parents who wish their children to be prepared for college success. And, in the near future, the state of Georgia’s new Adequate Yearly Progress or ‘AYP’ proposal to the federal government is all about ‘college and career ready’ inclusive of ACT results.”

He added, “When it comes to state and national testing, I believe our public should be aware that there is apparently little relationship between how well our school system performed on last year’s Georgia High School Graduation Tests and last year’s ACT. You may recall that our GHS GT results in 2011 showed **94%** passing science (up 3%), **92%** passing language arts (up 2%), **85%** passing social studies (up 6%), and **78%** passing math (new curriculum). Given our low ACT scores over the past several years, I can only conclude that there is little relationship between good results on the GHS GT and the college-level ACT. Put another way, the GHS GT is ‘minimum competency,’ at best, versus the ACT which is ‘college ready.’ Big difference,” concluded Dr. Mathews.

“Finally, while it is much easier [though *not* always easy] to impact minimum competency results such as the GHS GT or CRCTs through a higher quality of instruction well aligned to the intended and tested curriculum, it is a much more difficult proposition to produce students who are truly ‘ready’ in college English composition, college reading in social science, college algebra, and college biology, the four areas tested by the ACT. The latter is a product of years of quality college-level preparation entailing the cumulative impact of elementary, middle, and high school-level education,” said Dr. Mathews.

For more information on the NCSS ACT scores, please contact Dr. Carl Skinner, Director of Testing, Research, and Evaluation at skinner.carl@newton.k12.ga.us.
