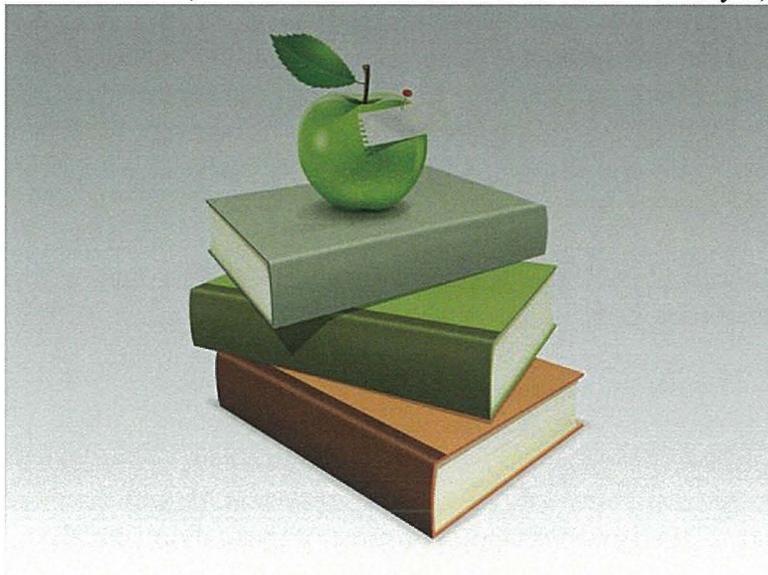


Alabama students doing better than ever

Thomas Rains, Alabama Voices 9:23 a.m. CST February 3, 2016



Alabama students are doing better than ever before. They are reading more, writing, more and thinking more. As a result Alabama schools are earning a new reputation – one that we can all be proud of, and one that we can maintain if we reject renewed efforts to roll back Alabama’s College and Career Ready Standards.

Last week, a [Harvard University study](#) credited Alabama with having made huge gains in its expectations of students.

Harvard conducts this study every two years. In its most recent analysis (the first since Alabama’s College and Career Ready Standards were implemented) Alabama scored a B, up significantly from grades of “F” given in 2009, 2011, and 2013.

This recognition from Harvard confirms what [University of Alabama professor Jeremy Zelkowski](#) already knew when he examined Alabama’s College and Career Ready Standards a few years ago. The old standards, he said, “only expected student understanding at a basic skills level,” but the new standards expect “students to be at a proficient skills level and have a deeper understanding.”

In many ways, increasing our expectations of students comes down to being honest with students about what’s expected of them after they graduate, and giving them the knowledge and skills to be successful.

Today, Alabama is being hailed as a “Truth Teller” state for the second consecutive year in the [national “Honesty Gap” report](#). The state won this designation for using the ACT Aspire

test, which every third through eighth graders in Alabama take each spring. Alabama set a high bar for students so we could be honest with them (and their parents) about where they stand academically.

The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards outline what students are expected to know and be able to do in reading and math at each grade level. They require critical thinking and analysis, not just memorization and regurgitation of facts, because real-life problems don't come with worksheets or bubbles to fill.

As parents know, this was not always the case.

Previously, our standards focused on low-level skills that asked students to memorize the answer, whether or not they understood it or not.

We were producing students who were eligible for college, but didn't have the skills to be successful. When they started college or entered the workforce, many were so far behind they were never able to catch up.

The result: Many college students required costly remediation and most of those didn't finish college.

We failed both the students and their parents because we didn't hold our students (and teachers) to a high-enough standard.

No so any more.

Bringing Alabama standards in line with what is needed to be successful presented challenges. Shifting from low-skills tests to tests that actually measure proficiency caused both teachers and students to work harder and, naturally initial scores were lower.

An increasing number of parents who were struggling to understand the new expectations are now embracing them. They recognize and value the increased opportunities their children will have later on as a result of asking them to think critically and apply what they are learning in school.

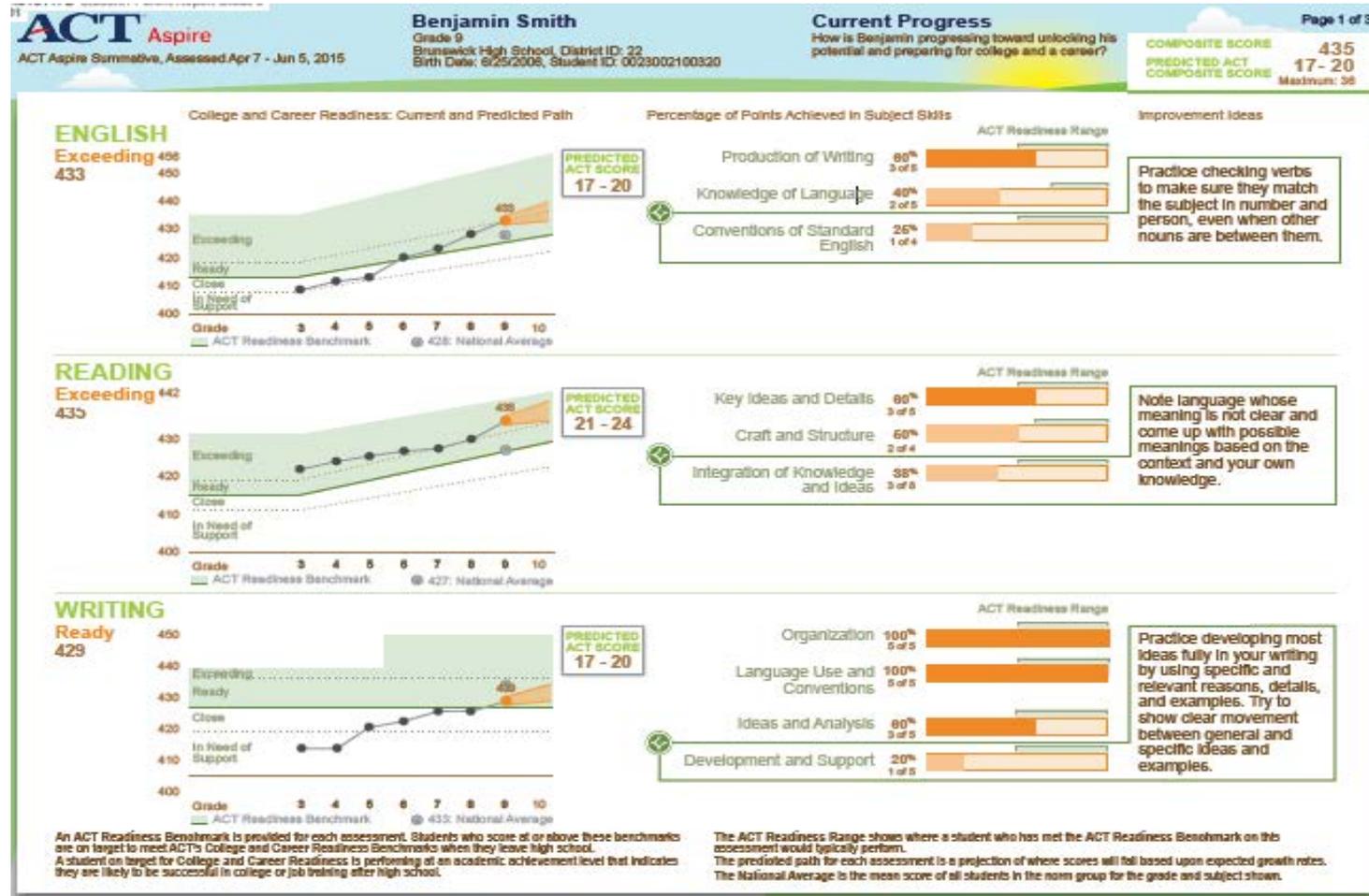
So, we're making progress by raising expectations. Repealing the standards which have set Alabama students on a course to success would be a devastating message to them, to their parents, and their teachers.

The State Board of Education's Plan 2020 is working, and we need to stay the course with the College and Career Ready Standards.

Thomas Rains is the vice president for policy at A Plus Education Partnership.

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After the assessment.....



Test scores are estimates of student knowledge and achievement. The student's actual achievement could be slightly higher or lower than the scores shown.

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After the assessment.....

ACT Aspire
Summative, Assessed Apr 7 - Jun 5, 2015

Benjamin Smith
Grade 9
Brunswick High School, District ID: 22
Birth Date: 6/25/2008, Student ID: 0023002100320

Supplemental Scores
How can additional performance measures inform decisions?

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NATIONAL PERCENTILE RANK

Subject	Percentile
English	78 th
Reading	74 th
Writing	68 th
Science	89 th
Mathematics	80 th

Your ranks show the percentage of other grade 9 students in the nation who received a score that is the same as or lower than yours.

For example, a rank of 78 for your English score means 78% of students earned that score or below.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Ready
432

English, Reading and Writing Combined Score

Your English Language Arts (ELA) score represents your overall performance on the English, reading, and writing tests. The ACT Readiness Range represents the typical performance of students who meet the ACT Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, and writing.

ACT Readiness Range: 403 - 449

✔ The ability to communicate thoughts and ideas clearly and to read and understand increasingly complex information is foundational to academic success in all subjects.

PROGRESS WITH TEXT COMPLEXITY

Students must read and understand increasingly complex texts to prepare for the reading demands of college and career. Examples of factors that contribute to text complexity are vocabulary level and sentence structure. The reading test measures progress with text complexity by checking for understanding of texts from a range of complexity levels.

Sufficient Progress

Yes No

✔ Continue to build reading experiences with increasingly complex texts about a variety of subjects. Reading routines should include some careful reading of challenging texts with a focus on unfamiliar language and ideas that are central to the meaning.

STEM

Ready
436

Science and Mathematics Combined Score

Your STEM score represents your overall performance on the science and math tests. The ACT Readiness Range represents the typical performance of students who meet the ACT Readiness Benchmarks in science and math.

ACT Readiness Range: 400 - 455

✔ Developing strong science and math skills opens the door for you to take interesting courses and pursue engaging college majors that may lead to rewarding STEM careers in the future.

Taking challenging high school or vocational courses in science and math can improve your opportunities to find STEM careers in a wide variety of industries, such as Health Care, Engineering, Education, and Technology.

PROGRESS TOWARD CAREER READINESS

435
Composite Score

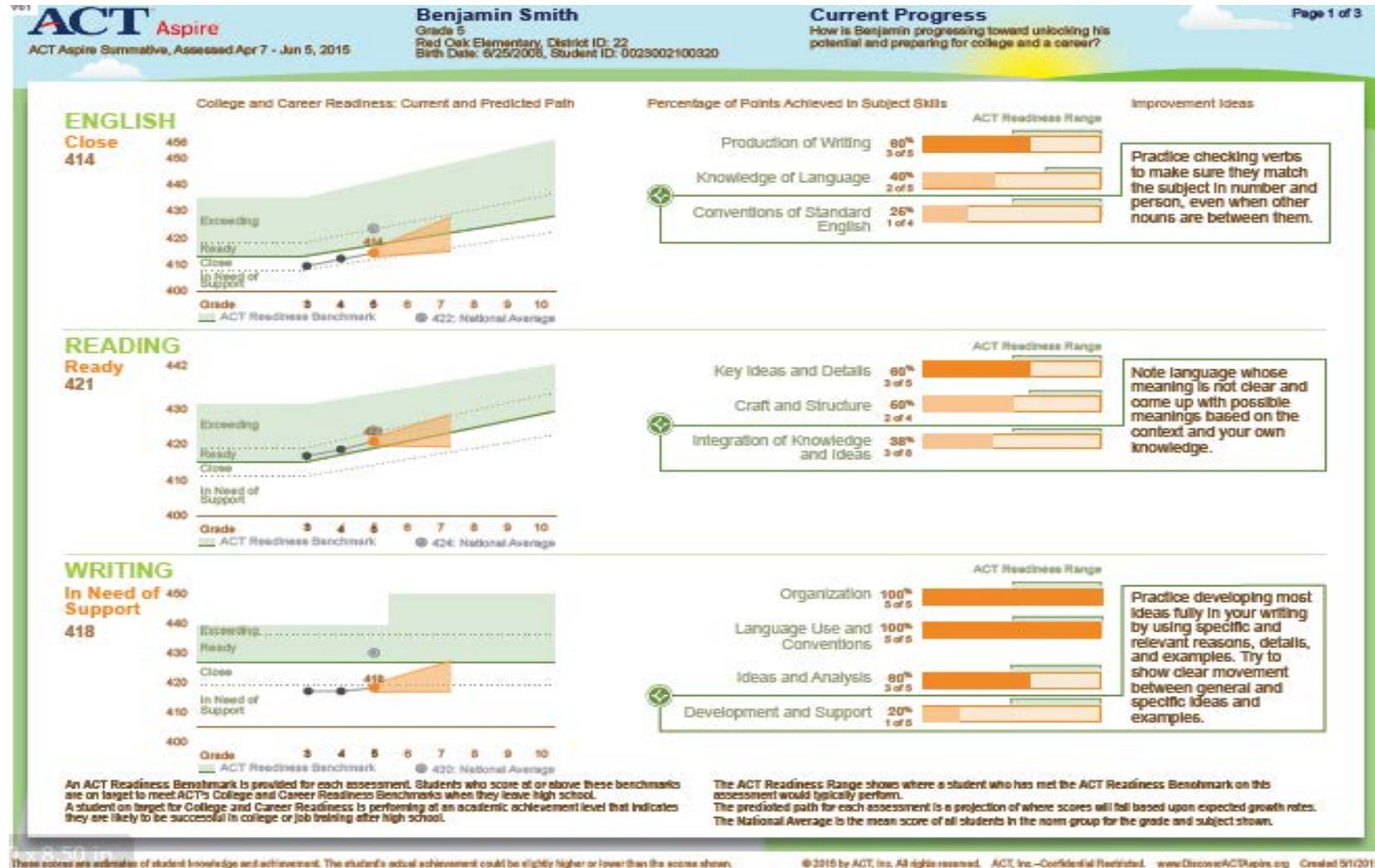
You are making progress toward a Gold level on the ACT NCRC.

400 - 452

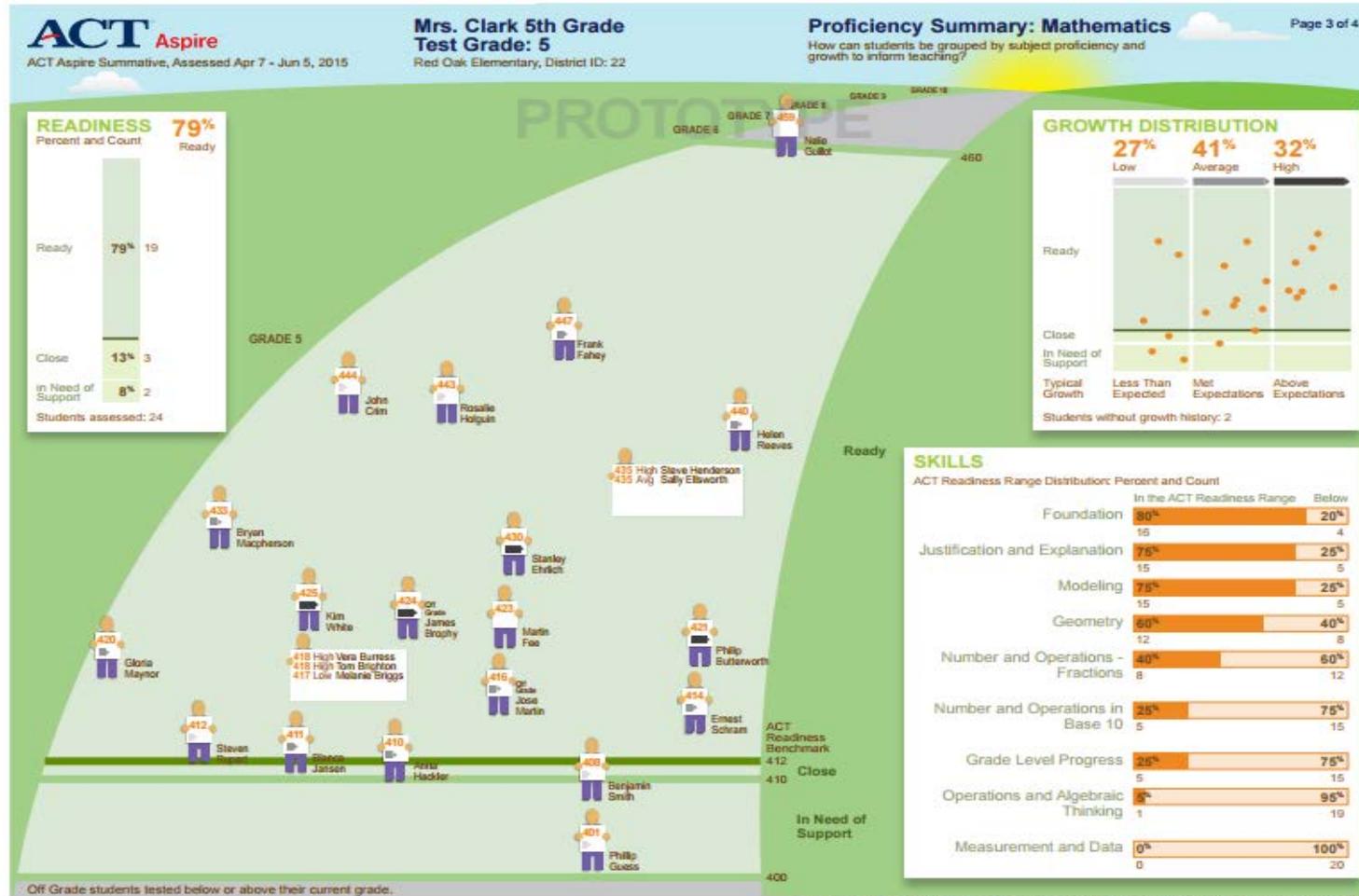
✔ Learn how NCRC performance relates to job skill requirements: <http://www.act.org/workkeys/briefs/files/NCRCRequirements.pdf>. This information is not to be considered a substitute for actual performance on the ACT NCRC.

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After the assessment.....



Teacher reports



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Teacher reports

