

Durant ACT scores drop 3 years in a row

By Royce Richman

Durant's American College Testing (ACT) scores have been on a downward spiral for the past three years but could see a rebound as fewer students are taking the test this year.

Since 2021, Durant High School has given all juniors the opportunity to take the ACT free of charge.

According to recent data collected by the Iowa education department, the Class of 2024's average composite score was 17.5. The Class of 2023 scored 17.8 while the Class of 2022 scored 18.

Before students could take the test for free, the Class of 2021 had an average of 20.5. However, only 30 students from that class actually took the ACT.

In the following year, 52 students took the test when the school started covering the costs. That coincided with the continuing drop in scores.

Only 25 juniors have signed up to take the test on March 11 after an email was

sent out explaining that colleges are no longer requiring the ACT for admission. Another change this year was that students had to sign up to take the test. In years past, they were automatically enrolled and had to opt out, giving the impression the test was mandatory.

Because of this, Principal Mr. Joel Diederichs is optimistic about the scores finally bouncing back this year.

"The trend is swinging back now as the students who are taking the ACT are planning on going on with their education compared to in the past," he said.

At least 12 of this year's juniors have already taken the ACT since Durant requires it for students who want to take online college classes through Muscatine Community College. The high school pays for the MCC classes, which also count as high school credits, so there is a big incentive to take the ACT earlier than junior year.

One of the students who took the test as a sophomore is junior Nolan Williams

who will take the test again next month through the school to hopefully improve his score.

"Taking the ACT was very stressful," he said. "There were time constraints, so I felt that I had to rush through the tests."

Williams said that taking the test as a sophomore also left him unprepared for many of the questions.

"Many of the questions that I had on the tests, I had never seen anything like before," he said. "That's a big reason why I'm taking it again. I'm hoping that after taking another year of high school, I'll be able to use my wider range of knowledge to get better scores."

The individual subjects that students are tested over in the ACT are reading, English, math, and science. The Durant Class of 2024 improved in the individual categories of English and math compared to the Class of 2023, had a small dip in science, but dropped two full points in reading.

Junior high and high school En-

glish teacher Mrs. Cathy Pearlman said that there could be multiple causes for the lower reading score.

"I think there are many unknowns that could have contributed to the drop, and unfortunately, many of these are outside of what we can teach in our classes," she said.

"Lack of sleep or stress from balancing classes, jobs, and extracurriculars are only a few of the contributing factors that we cannot help students with but can negatively impact any standardized test score."

National ACT scores have also been dropping, according to an article by the Best Colleges website.

It indicated the average composite score for the Class of 2024 is the lowest it's been in over 30 years.

The article explained the number of test takers across the nation has been dropping in the past few years as well, with 58 percent of the Class of 2016 taking the ACT, compared to only 36 percent of the 2024 class.

Shop students excel at ABC challenge with comeback victory

By Allison Toft

For the first time in three years, Durant shop students recently captured a win at the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) challenge.

Each year Mr. Tim Rouse, industrial technology teacher, gathers a group of five students to compete in the ABC challenge in Des Moines in December.

As part of the challenge, the students are given a set of instructions and given four hours to complete the project.

The ABC challenge consists of three events: the construction competition, the welding competition, and the electrical competition. However, Mr. Rouse has only taken students to the construction competition.

"I try to take my best builders and thinkers," Mr. Rouse said. "Typically four upperclassmen and one underclassmen."

This year's group included seniors Dalton Rock, Conner Schwarz, Cole DeWulf, Bryce Daufeldt, and Kady Krak-

lio.

"It was the first time that everybody in our group had worked together, so I didn't really know how well it was going to go, but it actually went pretty well," Rock said.

"You spend the day up there watching other people and how they build, and you can find new ways of building and developing teamwork."

Last year, Durant placed seventh in the challenge and was motivated to finish higher this year. A team from Durant last won in 2021.

"I think it helped us to see what we needed to do better this year," Mr. Rouse said.

The 2024 challenge was to build a small-scale house, and only nine of the 25 schools were able to complete the project, according to Rock

He said the project's small scale made it difficult to build.

"It was a house, but it was small scale, so the windows were much smaller,

the angles of the roof, where the door had to be, it had to be a certain length, and it had to be in a certain spot," Rock said.

"And a lot of the other teams put the window on the wrong side or the door on the wrong side."

Another spring shop competition, SkillsUSA, is considered the state tournament for Iowa shop teams, according to Mr. Rouse, and the top two teams advance to nationals.

However, the ABC challenge is the best option for Durant to compete in currently.

"It is just too costly for us at this time to try that road," Mr. Rouse said.

After the ABC project was completed, the team took the small-scale house and was able to modify it to get good use out of it.

"We added a few things then donated it to a community member, someone who had a small child and one more on the way," Mr. Rouse said. "It gave us the chance to

build it for someone that we knew would get some good use out of it."



Photo contributed by Tim Rouse
Durant shop students Bryce Daufeldt, Kady Kraklio, Cole DeWulf, Dalton Rock, and Conner Schwarz won the ABC challenge in Des Moines in December.

New program creates career opportunities for Durant students

By Gavin Broussard

Both Durant High School and Wilton High School will see the addition of a new program next school year that will help students prepare for college and the workforce.

The iJAG (Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates) program gives high school students the opportunity to develop their education and workplace skills. Currently, Program Supervisor Ms. Miranda Durham watches over iJAG programs in Davenport, Muscatine, West Liberty, and East Moline. She has been in this position for two years and used to work with the iJAG program in Muscatine as a teacher.

Ms. Durham works to connect iJAG with school administrators and staff, important people in the community, and employers. She does this to give the students under the program all the information they need for their next step and loves what she does.

"As a Durant resident and graduate, I'm very excited to be able to share what I love here at home," said Ms. Durham who laid out what this program could look like for students at Durant and Wilton High

Schools next school year.

"We expect to offer iJAG during two class periods at both Durant and Wilton High Schools starting in the '25-'26 school year," said Ms. Durham. "As part of the course, students will form their own Career Association, elect officers, and have the chance to compete in leadership and skills competitions at both the state and national level."

Students who are taking an iJAG class will receive an elective credit and also get experience outside of the classroom.

"A big part of iJAG is connecting students to their greater communities," said Ms. Durham. "Each student will also participate in a fundraiser to gain business experience and perform 15 hours of community service."

Ms. Durham said iJAG students can expect to take part in activities including career exploration, career and educational guest speakers, legislative visits, field trips, internships, apprenticeships, and other individualized work experiences. An important part behind why this program is offered is to help connect students with employers for

when they finish school.

"All of our Career Education Specialists and Program Supervisors are certified Work-Based Learning Supervisors," said Ms. Durham. "We utilize multiple tools both in and out of the classroom to help students identify their career paths, build soft skills for success in the workplace, and gain hands-on work experience tailored to their individual goals."

The program will use project-based learning to set the iJAG students up for the future.

"Through project-based learning, students identify their goals and gain confidence and skills that help them graduate and transition to the next stage of life whether that be college or trade school, the military, or entering the workforce directly," she said.

The Durant school district currently has a Muscatine Community College (MCC) work-based learning coordinator, Ms. Christina Anderson, who anticipates she will work with Durant's iJAG program next year.

"I partner with the West Liberty iJAG teacher throughout the year," she said. "I line up guest speakers for her, arrange site

visits with local businesses, coordinate job shadows for her students, etc."

Ms. Durham said she and Ms. Anderson "work together, not in competition," to provide more help for Durant students when it comes to career exploration.

"Christina is excellent at sourcing and coordinating work-based learning experiences and has been invaluable to my West Liberty Specialist and students," said Ms. Durham. "We look forward to partnering with her in Durant."

Ms. Anderson said one difference between her position and Durant's iJAG instructor is the number of students reached. Ms. Anderson can offer resources to the whole student body and staff.

"I'm always looking at ways to partner, but I can't tell you exactly how I will work with them [Durant] as it changes at the different institutions," Ms. Anderson said.

Ms. Anderson currently works to help Durant students explore different careers, organize work-based field trips, and set up job shadows and internships. She also provides students with the necessary information to move on to the next step.