## Preparation by eighth grade critical to college readiness

for college and career readiness "The Forgotten Middle," a new research report by ACT Inc.

The findings suggest the level of academic achievement that stutime they graduate than any single factor examined, including courses taken, grades earned in high school and demographic characteristics such as gender, race and household income.

"Eighth grade is a critical defining point for students in the college and career planning process," said Cynthia B. Schmeiser, president and chief operating officer of ACT's Education Division. "If students are not on target for college and career readiness by the time they reach this point, the impact may be nearly irreversible."

The findings suggest that few U.S. eighth-graders are currently on target to be ready for collegelevel work by the time they graduate. Only 16 percent of the recent high school graduates studied in ACT's research had met or sur-

## Winter raises risk of carbon monoxide

Safe Kids Kansas reminds parents and child-care workers that fuel-burning appliances such as space heaters and generators can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide in the home.

"We all know it's essential to have working smoke alarms ... but what about carbon monoxide detectors?" asked Jan Stegelman, Safe Kids Kansas coordinator. "Carbon monoxide is odorless and invisible. It can kill, and can make a child seriously ill in small doses that might not noticeably affect an adult.'

Each year in the United States, nearly 4,000 children are treated in emergency rooms for carbon monoxide exposure, not counting fire-related cases, and seven die.

"Half of all CO poisoning deaths could be prevented by CO detectors," said Stegelman. "CO detectors are available at hardware stores for about \$20, a small price to pay to help detect odorless, poisonous gases in the home."

Other precautions:

Make sure heating appliances are in good working order and used only in well-ventilated areas.

· Have fireplace flues and chimneys inspected.

• Don't run a car engine in the

garage.

For information about carbon monoxide poisoning, visit www. safekids.org.

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Readiness Benchmarks in all four by eighth grade are unlikely to at- subject areas—English, math, tain that level of readiness by high reading, and science — on EXschool graduation, according to PLORE, the organization's eighth grade assessment of academic

Students who meet those benchmarks are on target to be collegedents attain by eighth grade has a ready by the time they graduate bigger impact on whether they are from high school. College readiready for college and career by the ness is defined by ACT as having a likelihood of earning a "C" or higher in first-year college courses in each subject area.

Conversely, the report suggests, being on target for college and career readiness by eighth grade puts students on a trajectory for success in high school and beyond. Among three groups of eighth-grade students studied those who were on target, those who just missed being on target and those who were substantially off target — only those who were on target in eighth grade were ultimately ready for college and career by their junior or senior year.

"The implications of this research are clear," said Schmeiser. "If we want to improve college readiness among U.S. high school graduates, we need to intervene before students reach high school, in upper elementary and middle school.

"The findings impact not only how we prepare students leading up to high school but in what stra-

high school. Both elements are critical for ensuring that our high school grads are ready for college and career. Our students deserve it, and our nation demands it."

The need to build the foundation for college and career readiness well before high school is a topic that has at times been overshadowed on a crowded education reform agenda. Perhaps the most notable recent focus on reform has been in U.S. President-elect Barack Obama's education plan, which places significant emphasis on improving high school achievement and graduation rates by reforming education in the upper elementary and middle-school grades. The plan would require states to develop early-warning systems that identify at-risk students in grades 5 through 8 and provide interventions that help those students succeed.

ACT's report suggests that the impact of this problem extends beyond college preparation to the U.S. workforce and the economy.

'The skills necessary for entry into the majority of the fastest growing jobs that require a high school diploma and offer a livable wage are comparable to those needed for success in first-year college courses," said Schmeiser. "In the context of our current economic challenges, we should be

Students who aren't on track passed the organization's College tegic ways we intervene with those targeting eighth grade readiness as have a very difficult time makwho are behind academically in a key benchmark for our nation's ability to produce a workforce that is ready to succeed and compete in the global economy. The findings suggest we have a long way to go to ensure that outcome.'

ACT's longitudinal research followed approximately 216,000 students in the U.S. graduating classes of 2005 and 2006 from eighth grade through high school graduation. All of these students had taken each of the three curriculum-based assessments in ACT's College Readiness System — EX-PLORE for eighth-graders, PLAN for 10th-graders, and the ACT college admission and placement

Schmeiser noted that high school-level action, such as taking more rigorous courses, studying harder and earning higher grades, can help to improve students' level of readiness.

"Students who aren't on track for readiness by eighth grade will

ing up all of the ground they have lost," she said. "Without sufficient preparation prior to high school, students can't maximize the benefits of academic enhancements while they are there."

The study also found that improving behavior of middle-school students can help increase their readiness for college and career. Two academic behaviors were found to have the greatest impact on both eighth-grade course failure and ninth-grade grade average: academic discipline (e.g., good work and study habits) and orderly conduct (behaving appropriately in class).

ACT's report lays out the specific knowledge and skills in English, math, reading, and science that students must attain by the end of eighth grade to be on target for college and career success.

The report also offers several recommendations to educators and policy makers on how to im-

prove college and career readiness among high school graduates, including:

• Focus kindergarten through eighth grade standards on the knowledge and skills that are essential for college and career readiness, and make these mandatory for all students.

• Monitor student progress to-

ward college and career readiness beginning in upper elementary school and continuing through middle school, and work with students who are not on target.

• Improve students' academic behavior - homework compliance, attendance, and other aspects of academic discipline.

• Increase federal and state support for schools to implement intervention programs that help all students become ready for college and career.

ACT's report, "The Forgotten Middle," is available for viewing and free downloading at www. act.org/research.



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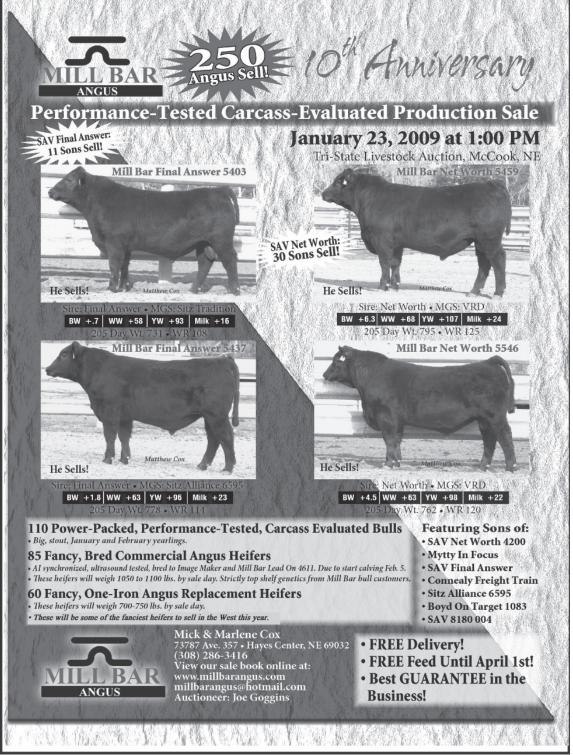
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