

## **Effects of the ACT on the mental health of high school Juniors**

Transcript

Introduction

Hello, my name is Loren Tabron and I am a Junior at Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience. In the Saint Louis Public School District, highschool Juniors are required to take the ACT. Throughout the process of preparing for the ACT I experienced feelings of stress and worry, so I chose the topic of *How The ACT Affects the Mental Health of High School Juniors* to get an insight on how other students felt about taking the ACT and how the test affected their stress levels before and after taking it. I also wanted to know about how prepared students felt for the test and if they think it should still be a requirement for Juniors in the district.

Interview with Laura Brown & Semret Yehdego

Thursday May 11, 2023

**Loren Tabron (Me)** [00:00:01] so today we have.

**Semret Yehdego** [00:00:02] Semret.

**Laura Brown** [00:00:03] and Laura.

**Loren Tabron (Me)** [00:00:04] and today we're going to be talking about how the ACT affects the mental health of high school juniors. So for my first question, I'm going to ask, how was your mood affected when you first received your score after you took the test?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:00:18] I kind of predicted my score a little bit before based off my preparedness, but I would say it still affecting my mood. I was a little upset because of how low my score was. But yeah that's basically how my mood was.

**Laura Brown** [00:00:31] Yeah, I was kind of in the same boat because I felt prepared, but I still was. I kind of knew like, how my score was going to look, so. I was upset about my score because I felt like it was low.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:00:45] Yeah, I was upset too, because I felt like my score was kind of low and I did do a lot of prep. And that actually leads you to my next question, which is did you feel prepared when you like did you feel you did enough prep before you took it?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:01:01] Me personally, no. When the ACT teacher would assign us things me personally, I did not do them and I had a lot of things going on before and I was supposed to take a ACT prep class in January, but I had something major go on in my family and I wasn't able to do that, so I was not prepared at all, which is why I also predicted the score that I was going to have.

**Laura Brown** [00:01:21] For the most part, I did feel like I was prepared I did feel like I was prepared because I did attend the classes for the most part. Um, so yeah.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:01:36] So what would you what would you rate your stress levels before you took the test? And leading up to it.

**Semret Yehdego** [00:01:43] I would say they were very, very high. I had already been stressing about it since around January, like I said, multiple times. But as it got closer and closer, my stress levels were getting super high and I feel like that also had a role in my score because I'm a person that gets really anxious, and when I'm anxious, my brain can't flow as it regularly would.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:02:08] So it was. How was your stress levels before the test?

**Laura Brown** [00:02:11] Oh, before, the test. Um, I was really hot. I don't know if that had anything to do with my stress, but that kind of made me uncomfortable cause I was looking for water before the test, and I was trying to run around, so it took me a second to actually calm down and get focused. So, um, but afterwards, I didn't feel as stressed about it, but it was like, sort of like in the back of my head, I was like awe couldn't finish this section and that section. So I knew that like, obviously affected my score so.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:02:41] So what would you rate like your mood and your stress levels, like the week before or the weeks leading up?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:02:48] Very, very, very, very high. Um, I was very anxious about it, but I was trying to do some prep, but I didn't. I didn't have a lot of time to. And then just knowing what like knowing that it has a big effect on my future was also stressing me out even more.

**Laura Brown** [00:03:07] I have those thoughts, but they don't stress me out. I'm more of a procrastinator so I don't be stressing until like the day before or like right before the test. So for me, even before it, it was just the thought that I can take this again and I can also have the idea of a super score. So like in my mind, I knew even if I do bad, I know what I need to work on and I could actually take the test that's coming up in June and July.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:03:35] Yeah, that helped me out to like the fact that you could retake it and like that schools do take a super score. They made me feel better. So would you guys say that your sleep was affected before you took the test?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:03:49] Yeah. Um. Me being anxious person and having terrible sleep when I'm stressed, I would say my sleep, starting like the week before, was not normal. And then also playing sports and having tests and stuff I can compare. I can also compare that to now, which I'm in the same boat with my AP tests and all these projects that I'm also stressing about. So I can say yeah stress these types of levels of stress always have an affect on my sleep.

**Laura Brown** [00:04:17] For me, actually, I didn't it didn't affect my sleep schedule or sleep activity, it was pretty much the same as it is normally. So I slept pretty regularly.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:04:31] So how would you rate your stress after the test was over?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:04:39] I was still stressed because thinking about like when I'm going to get that test score back. But it was also kind of like a little bit of a relief. Like all that stress that was built up was kind of like distressed, I guess I would say, because now it's over. And then also, like Laura said earlier, thinking about just retaking it and trying to like slow my mind back into.

**Laura Brown** [00:05:00] So yeah, I can say I was pretty in the middle, probably about a four or a five because the one thing I was really concerned about was the fact that I didn't finish some sections and about the score that I would get. I was pretty confident that I would take it again and do better.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:05:16] So, Laura, I know you said you were going to retake it, but Semi, are you going to retake the test?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:05:21] Yeah I'll be retaking it in June and most likely July also to try and build up my super score.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:05:27] And do you plan to take it a third time Laura?

**Laura Brown** [00:05:30] I just might just to see, depending on the scores I get from taking it the first or second time whether I feel like I need to. Um, honestly, I don't think I'm probably going to score that high on math, so I'm just focusing on the other three, which are my best subjects. So if need be, then I'll take it again. But I'll see what happens with these first two.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:05:51] And so my next question is, do you feel that you had access to proper preparation materials and study materials before you took the test?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:06:05] Um, I would say yes and no. Do you mean like the. The A.C.T. program we had at school.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:06:14] Yeah and like anything outside of that like did you feel like you had access to enough materials to make you feel prepared for the test?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:06:25] I was saying yes and no. I feel like. Actually, I would say yes. I just don't think I used it properly. I was given a lot of books that I could've used to study. But I took it upon myself to not use those tools. So I think that also affected my score.

**Laura Brown** [00:06:45] I would say yes and no. Yes, because I don't think at another school we would have the set up that we did where it was. Offered to us to have these scheduled meetings where we could switch off on the subjects and learn from the teachers that specialize in them. So I'm appreciative of that service because I did utilize it. But I would also say no, because in the timeframe that they would set up like not everybody, I feel like it accommodate everybody schedule, even though it was sort of fit to some people still weren't able to attend meetings even if they wanted to. So I guess that kind of set back set it back for some students.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:07:29] So I know you said you guys had stress before the test. So did you feel that the prep materials that were offered by school, did you feel like that helped or lowered the stress level that you could have had if you didn't have any of the prep materials?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:07:46] When doing the books? I only did like one or two of them, which I probably should have done more and I lowkey regret. But when I was doing them I was panicking because I kept I wasn't doing too good. So I guess that would I would say that increased my stress levels. But at the same time I would say also I would say it also decreased them because like I was gaining a little bit more knowledge about it and learning new tips and tricks a little bit.

**Laura Brown** [00:08:13] Yeah, I would say it lowered my stress as well because I was already familiar seeing similar questions and the tips like Semret, it said on how to solve them, how to label things how to conclude and answers and things and things like that. So, um, so actually taking the test, it wasn't completely new as far as if I didn't prepare and I was just going in there blind. So I'm glad that I had I had that.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:08:42] So overall you say it helped lower stress?

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:08:48] So do you all think the ACT is an accurate measure of academic knowledge?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:08:54] No. And I would say that flat out, because based off my grades, I would most people would say I'm academically smart, but as a person with a high GPA, I would say, no, the ACT does not say that because I feel like what I do in school does not reflect what I do on a test, does not reflect my knowledge. Because like as a person who stresses during large tests that are like pumped up to be so, so big, I don't do good on them. And there's so many factors that could go into this, like someone having terrible anxiety or someone like not remembering knowledge because when you're in school, you're doing your, your grades are based off of like years of knowledge stuff that you've learned like right before you. But this is stuff that you probably have learned a year or two ago that's like not fresh in your memory. So I would say it's more of like a more of like a skill, a skill based test. Not like a whole academic knowledge test.

**Laura Brown** [00:09:56] Yeah, I would say the same. I really do feel like it is not a great representation of your academic skills because even though you're using them your, like kind of forced to use it in a stressful environment as a whole. So it's more not even about the subject is about like your time management, like can you keep up with the time limit that you have. So I feel like it's more about speed versus your actual like, like the knowledge that you have. So at whole, No, I do not. I feel like, like Semret said your grades are better representation because it shows your skills over the years and how you know your work ethic. So yeah, I agree with Semret on that.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:10:41] And for my last question for today is do you think that we, the SLPS, should still require us to take the ACT?

**Semret Yehdego** [00:10:54] I say yes and no. I feel like it's an easy access to students who aren't able to like, go and do it on the weekends. And it's something that a lot of colleges expect from you. So I feel like that's one easy way to get it out the way. But I also say no, because like I said, I don't think it's accurate representation of your academic knowledge. So I don't think it should be required for anyone to do it, basically. But having it as it is something that's required, I feel like it's it's easy access point to the kids who do go to these public schools.

**Laura Brown** [00:11:28] Right. I don't think it should be required, but um, how the ACT is set up where we're like required to take it and how it is sort of an application for colleges it makes it so until those things change. You couldn't really unrequire it, I guess. But, um, I'm glad that it is an option so students won't, wouldn't have to pay to take a test that would allow them to further their education. Um so yeah.

**Loren Tabron(Me)** [00:11:59] OK that's all, guys. Thank you for interviewing with me today.

**Laura Brown, Semret Yehdego** [00:12:04] Thank you.

### Conclusion

After interviewing students I found that the ACT caused stress levels in students to rise and even affected their sleep patterns. Students reported that being able to retake the test eased some of their stress after the test, but waiting for their score was also stressful. One student felt the addition of their other classes and AP tests made it harder to prepare for the ACT. Overall, students felt the school did a sufficient job at offering preparation materials for the test and that the tutors gave helpful tips. Students felt that the ACT is not an accurate measure of academic knowledge but more a measure of speed and test-taking skills. Students think the ACT should still be required for SLPS juniors because it is a vital tool for the college admission process and it should still be accessible to all students.