

IMPLICATIONS OF INCREASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS  
FOR STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between graduation requirements of Southeast Missouri schools and graduation rates, percent of students scoring at or above the national average on the ACT, and percent of students enrolled in 2- or 4-yr colleges or post-secondary, non-university institutions. The study identified schools of the Southeast Region of Missouri by the counties of the Southeast Missouri Association of Secondary Principals. Seventy-eight schools of the 20-county region were surveyed to collect information that was used to link existing data provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Data collected encompassed a 17-year period of time marked by the impact Missouri School Improvement Legislation of 1983. Sixty-one of the 78 schools surveyed responded providing a reliable working sample of schools for the study.

The survey provided information regarding the number of credits each of the sample schools required when Missouri's minimum was 22 credits for graduation. The survey also collected information on whether schools altered their curriculum based on concerns for improved student performance in areas such as MAP testing, ACT scores, and college preparation.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate data. No significant correlations between increased graduation requirements and graduation rates, ACT

scores, or college enrollment were found. However, theoretical concepts and research reviewed for this study suggest state expectations for student performance produce slight increases in graduation rates and percent of students enrolled in colleges over periods of time. These tendencies are the same whether schools operated at the state's minimum requirement for graduation or whether schools operated with higher credit requirements. Further research is necessary, however, due to the potential impact on students who may be at-risk for graduation of higher expectations without adequate preparation.