

**ACT for All: The Effect of Mandatory College Entrance Exams on Postsecondary
Attainment and Choice**

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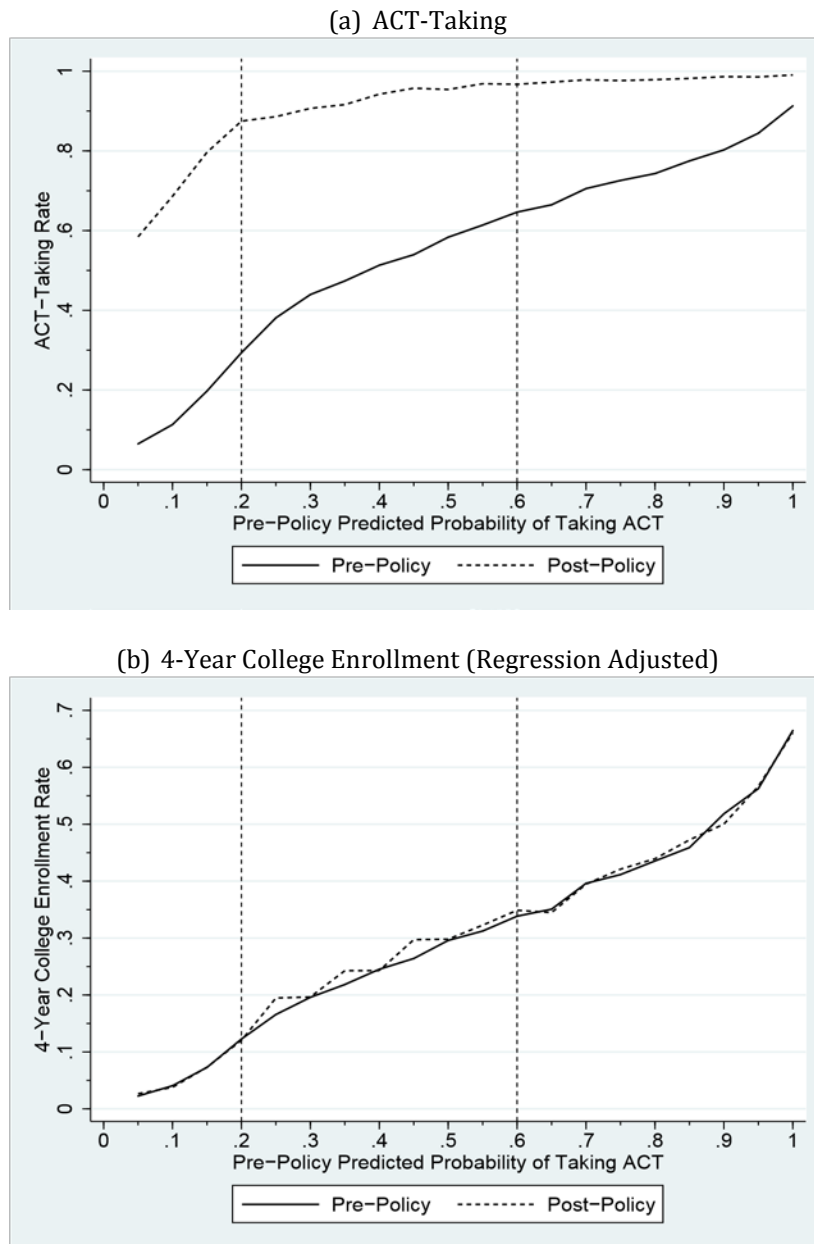
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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of requiring and paying for all public high school students to take a college entrance exam, a policy adopted by eleven states since 2001. I show that prior to the policy, for every ten poor students who score college-ready on the ACT or SAT, there are an additional five poor students who would score college-ready but who take neither exam. I use a difference-in-differences strategy to estimate the effects of the policy on postsecondary attainment and find small increases in enrollment at four-year institutions. The effects are concentrated among students less likely to take a college entrance exam in the absence of the policy and students in the poorest high schools. The students induced by the policy to enroll persist through college at approximately the same rate as their inframarginal peers. I calculate that the policy is more cost-effective than traditional student aid at boosting postsecondary attainment.

Figure 4. ACT-Taking and College Enrollment by Predicted Probability of ACT-Taking



Notes: Figure (a) plots the ACT-taking rate pre and post mandatory ACT at twenty quantiles of the predicted probability that a student would take the ACT based on the pre-policy relationship between observed characteristics and ACT-taking. Figure (b) plots the raw, pre-policy four-year enrollment rate among students in the matched sample of high schools (solid line) at these same twenty quantiles. It then adds to this line the difference-in-difference four-year enrollment effect of the policy (dashed line). Note the smaller scale of the Y-axis in figure (b) to more clearly show the difference between the two lines