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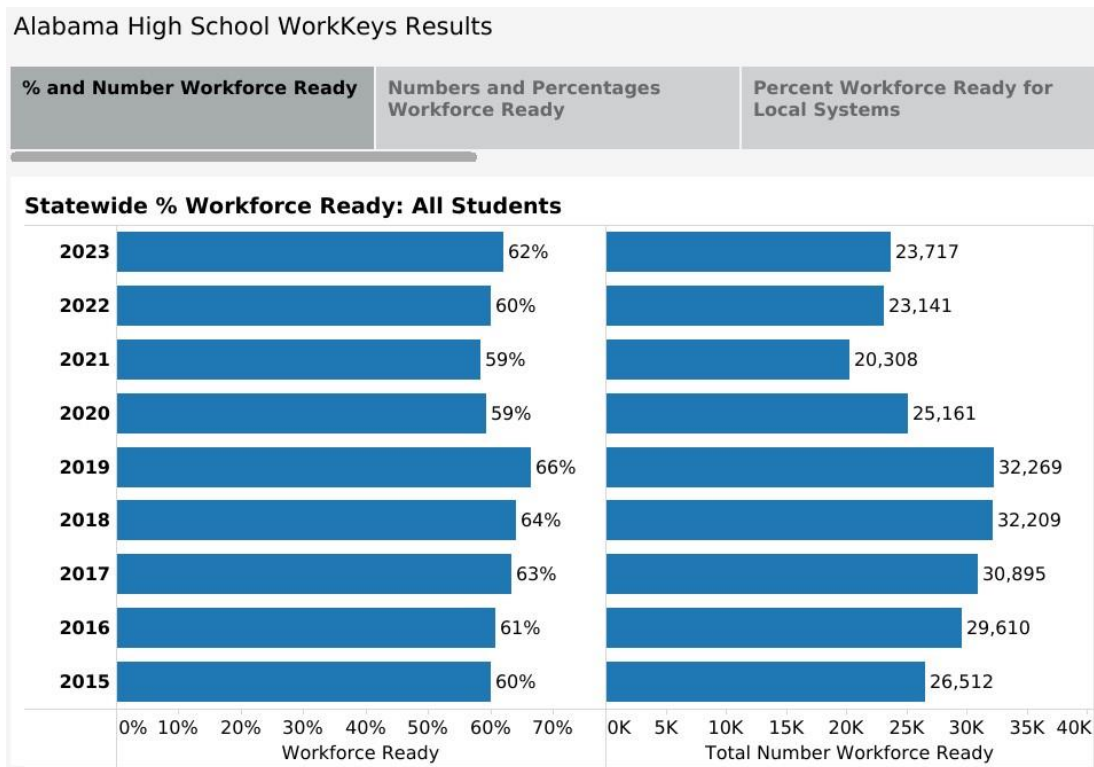
More Students Workforce Ready in the Class of 2023

By Thomas Spencer, March 14, 2024

The number and percentage of high school seniors graduating workforce-ready rose with the Class of 2023, according to the results of ACT’s WorkKeys Assessment, a test of skills given to public high school seniors. The results are another sign that student performance is recovering from post-pandemic lows, though the recovery is not complete.

The WorkKeys test measures practical math, reading, and graphical literacy skills as they are employed in the workplace. That’s different than the ACT, which tests for knowledge and skills needed in a college classroom. In 2023, 72% of seniors took the test statewide, and 62% of those tested scored at or above the silver level of workforce readiness.

Figure 1. WorkKeys Results, Statewide Trends



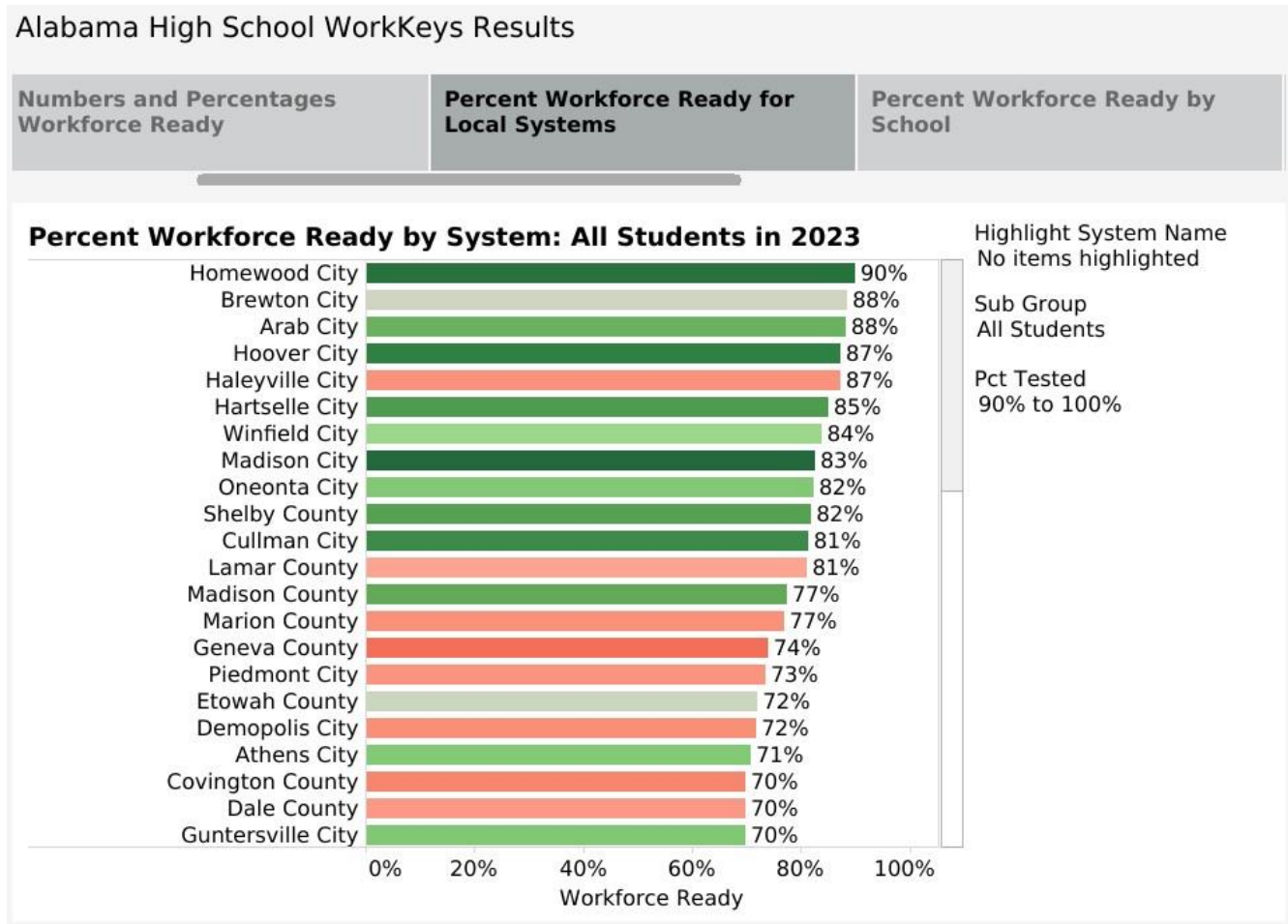
WorkKeys is optional, and school systems vary in the percentage of students tested. WorkKeys was given to all seniors through 2019, but the State Department of Education stopped mandating the test. Some systems still test all seniors. Some systems make the test an option for students who haven't demonstrated college and career readiness by another measure. WorkKeys is one of seven options for demonstrating college and career readiness.

Figure 2. Numbers and percentages of participation and passing the workforce-ready benchmark

| Alabama High School WorkKeys Results | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------|----------------------|---|-------------|
| % and Number Workforce Ready | Numbers and Percentages Workforce Ready | | | Percent Workforce Ready for Local Systems | |
| System.. State of Alabama | | | Sub G.. All Students | | |
| Number enrolled | | | | | |
| School Name | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| State of Alabama (Entire State) | 52,256 | 52,809 | 51,440 | 53,869 | 52,928 |
| Percent Tested | | | | | |
| School Name | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| State of Alabama (Entire State) | 93% | 80% | 67% | 72% | 72% |
| % of Tested Workforce Ready | | | | | |
| School Name | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| State of Alabama (Entire State) | 66% | 59% | 59% | 60% | 62% |
| Number Workforce Ready | | | | | |
| School Name | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| State of Alabama (Entire State) | 32,269 | 25,161 | 20,308 | 23,141 | 23,717 |

In addition, a student's score on WorkKeys can be a recognized credential in the job market. Some businesses, particularly industrial employers, build WorkKeys into their hiring practices. Working with ACT, those employers have determined what level of proficiency, as measured by WorkKeys, is needed in particular jobs. Depending on their test performance, students earn a platinum, gold, silver, or bronze National Career Readiness Certificate. A student scoring Silver or above has the foundational skills for 67% of jobs that ACT has profiled, and that student is considered college and career-ready by the Alabama Board of Education.

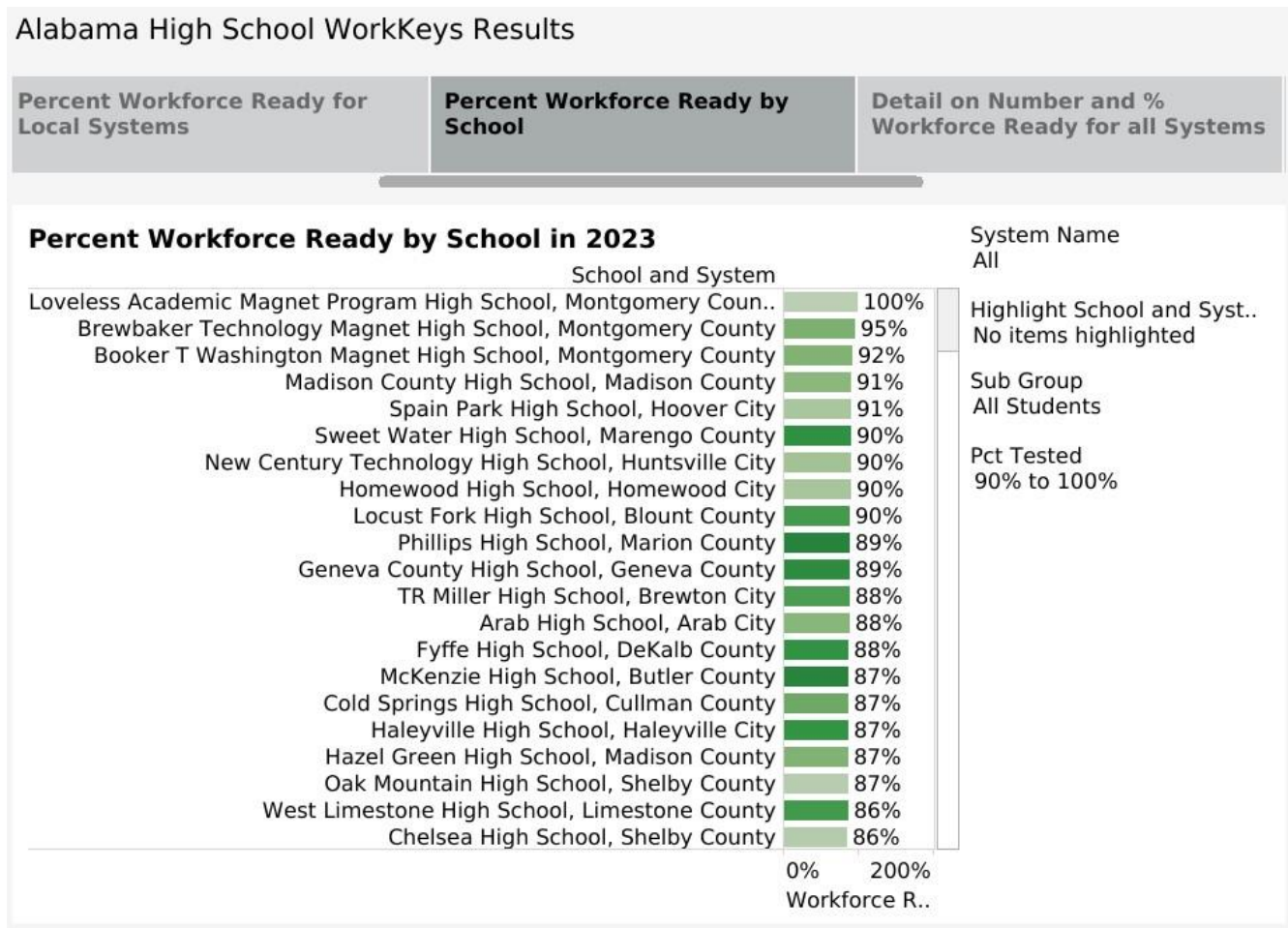
Figure 3. Percentage of all students workforce ready (scoring Silver or Above), by system, 2023 (Pictured are systems in which 90% of students were tested. Adjust filter to see other systems)



In Figure 3, the school systems are shaded by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in each system. In general, systems with higher poverty percentages tend to have lower percentages of students scoring workforce ready. However, on WorkKeys, the correlation is not nearly as strong as it is with other measures, like the ACT college readiness test. WorkKeys seems to provide a more even playing field for comparative performance.

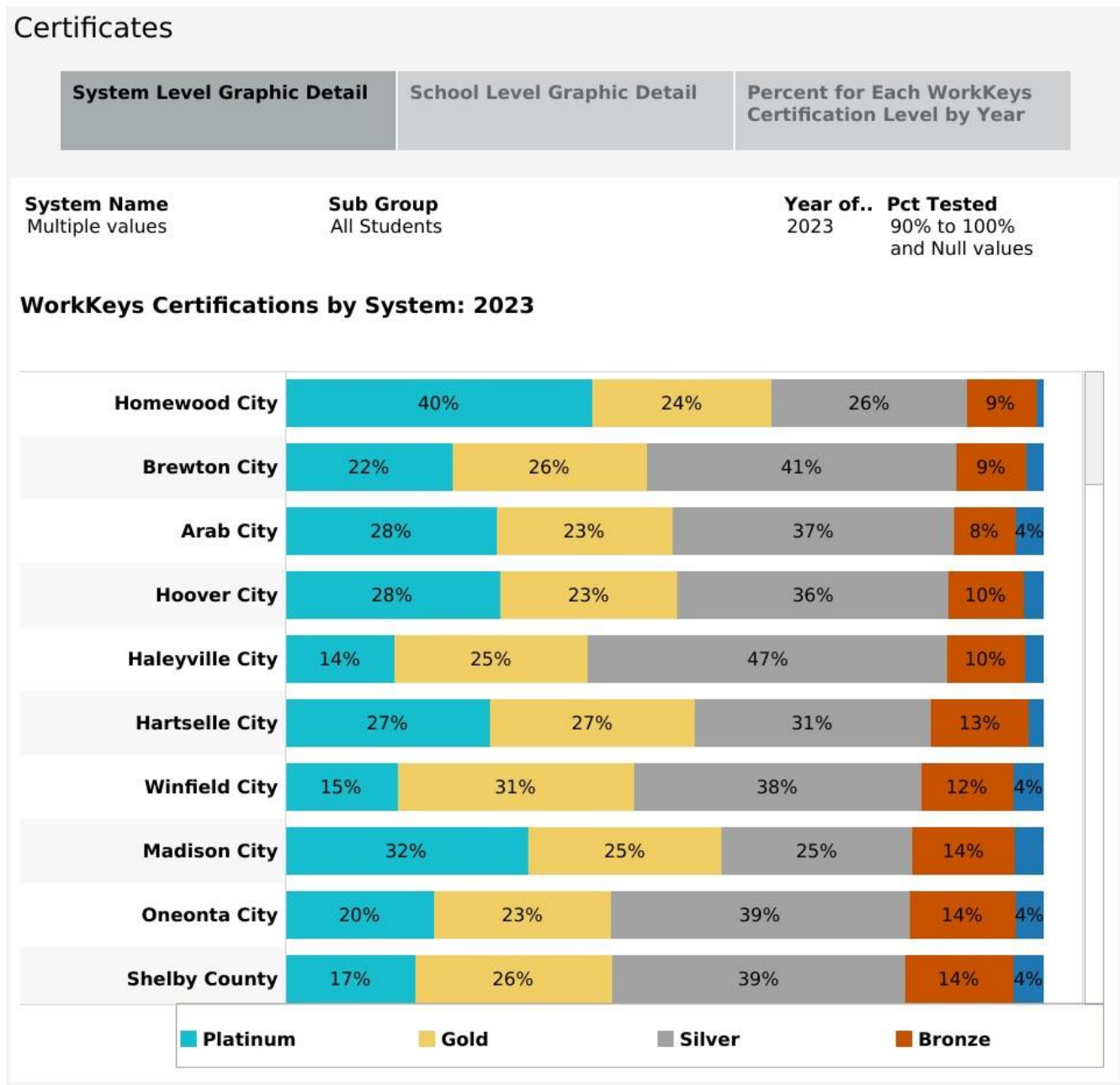
However, the 2023 WorkKeys test results do show a pattern similar to other assessments in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. After dropping in 2020, 2021, and 2022, WorkKeys results rebounded more strongly among nonpoverty students in 2023. In contrast, students from low-income backgrounds have been slower to recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 4. Percentage Workforce Ready by School, 2023



The visualization below presents the results in a more detailed fashion. Each color represents the percentage of tested students scoring at each level: platinum, gold, silver, bronze, and no certificate earned. Use the menus to adjust the comparison and use the various tabs, to explore different aspects of the data.

Figure 5. WorkKeys Results, by level of certification, by system, 2023



For more information and to visit the full blog post, go to <https://parcalabama.org/more-students-workforce-ready-in-the-class-of-2023/>.