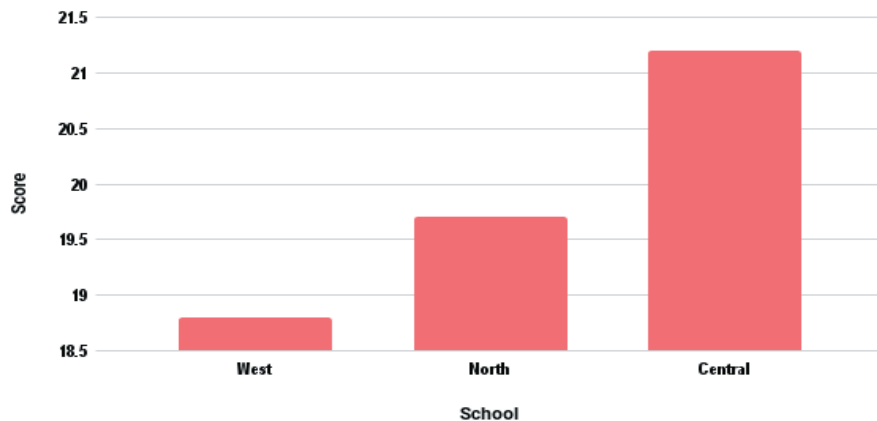


Davenport Schools reading ACT scores for 2017



Source ACT Inc. 5 year trend Iowa public schools

# Liberal arts left in the shadows

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I love to read, write and learn Spanish and social studies. The only problem is, West High School is not preparing me well enough for what I want to pursue. I am not even sure what career options are available to me with what I enjoy doing.

This is not only because they aren't informing me about possible careers, but it is not what our emphasis is on at West. I do certainly know that I could become an engineer, a doctor, a nurse or maybe even a mathematician if I liked math or science. It is a shame that I do not want a future with those studies whatsoever.

I come to school and try my best to take the classes that interest me, but elective opportunities for what I like are hardly available. What will happen when I arrive at college without knowing what I want to be and having had little experience in the fields that best fit my interests? I will spend thousands of dollars taking classes that should have been at my reach when I was in high school.

West has a plethora of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) classes, which are not required that the school offers to help students decide what they want to do with their futures and if they are interested in corresponding careers.

The Project Lead The Way program is one great example of an opportunity which STEM students have that will give them guidance and recognition in the subjects they care about. This includes the newly installed Principles of Biomedical Science class, Medical Interventions, the CNA dual enrollment class and Anatomy and Physiology offered to students expressing passions for a career in the medical field and many engineering and computer science courses for students exploring those fields.

The current elective courses, which do not go toward an English credit requirement for graduation in language arts do not exist at West according to head counselor Erin Soedt. All math and science elective courses are not required for graduation however give students extra opportunity.

West does offer many more elective courses among those for liberal arts classes, but because of the lack of incentive for students to take those classes as opposed to STEM courses in the first place, the enrollment is not high enough to run them.

I am not the only one who has expressed a passion for subjects other than those in STEM and want more opportunity for what I like.

"We are thrust into those subjects [science, technology, math etc.] and it closes a door for the subjects that people like me may want to pursue [foreign language and social studies]," junior Noah Hensley said.

My school takes great pride in its STEM curriculum and has produced many significant workers in the STEM workforce. In fact, my two older brothers, who are West graduates, are prime examples of students who have benefitted from such a program as they have both gone on to be engineers.

They were already well prepared for their studies as soon as they walked to their college campus. But we are forgetting about the students like me, who are quite concerned for our feelings of preparedness when we arrive to a university or college.

Currently, West's ACT average reading score is the lowest it has been in the last four years at 18.8 out of 36, while in 2015 it was at 20.6 and last year was at 20.3.

If our test scores in reading are currently so low, why don't we do something to better them?

STEM's elective classes create incentive for students to learn those subjects and earn better

test scores. Language arts lacks this much needed incentive.

Speaking with Michelle Harvey, a former West English teacher and current curriculum specialist for 6-12 language arts and 6-12 social studies, sees the evident distinction between these separate departments.

"When you look at a building like West High School, you may think 'so much money goes to STEM' [and] absolutely it does. You may look at liberal arts and think 'I don't even know what grants my language arts teachers have gotten in this building'. It is abundantly clear because you have many strong programs in STEM here," Harvey said.

When I sat in on a board meeting before the new board candidates were elected, I noticed that many of the adults knew that we had a world championship winning Robotics team, and many knew that our STEM program was doing very well. It was referred to that STEM was West's "thing". But no one spoke about the *Beak 'n' Eye* or the *Shaheen*, about our strong foreign language, social studies and music departments. I'm feeling left out because we do not give enough credit to these programs in this district.

Every subject uses another to make itself as great as it can be, and we should be acknowledging this. Engineers must have someone who can speak publicly and eloquently about the products they are creating to sell. Hospitals need translators who can help patients who may not know English. We all need to know our country's history so we can know what has worked well socially and economically, and what has failed so we do not repeat mistakes. People must understand the goals in STEM careers first and foremost, and therefore the work needs to be communicatively comprehensible.



Jarad Perez's pre calculus class on Friday, October 6. Only 17 were students present out of the usual 28, students gone for an engineering field trip.

"English is the base of all. You have to have your basic skills in reading, writing and speaking, and if you don't, it is not going to go well for you when you are out in the real world," English teacher Patricia Sheehey said.

I am a good student who has exceptional grades. I am involved in multiple extracurriculars and I do my best to see the importance of all the classes I take. I just do not happen to take interest in the subjects my school wishes I did.

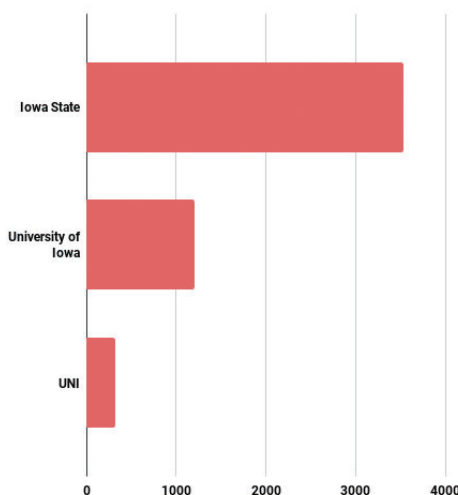
**We should not be minimizing the importance of liberal arts education and forgetting about the students who do not want to pursue STEM careers.**

I am the student my school says they want, so why is my education not as important to them?

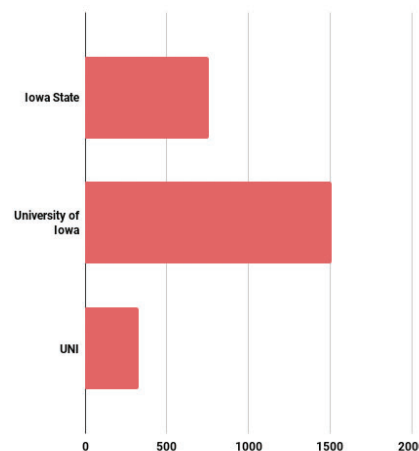
By no means do I disagree with the importance of STEM education and development of necessary math and science skills, and the extra courses do a great job preparing the students who would like to pursue those careers. However, we should not be minimizing the importance of liberal arts education and forgetting about the students who want to pursue careers in those studies. Providing recognition, acknowledgment and opportunity for me and students like me deserves the same significance.

Things like communication, learning about other cultures and languages, fostering relationships, self expression through writing, art and music, understanding historical content and social studies and so many other components helps us form not only a well rounded education, but a well rounded human being.

**STEM degrees at three state schools of Iowa (2016)**



**Humanities degrees at three state schools of Iowa (2016)**



Source National Center for Education Statistics

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The *Beak 'n' Eye* is published four times a year from West High School, 3505 W. Locust St., Davenport, IA 52804. The content is produced by students, and it does not represent the views of the Davenport school district or its employees. The *Beak 'n' Eye* is an open forum and welcomes signed letters to the editor. We are a member of the Iowa High School Press Association. Also visit [WHSToday.com](http://WHSToday.com) for more news, more photos and more you!