

SAT[®] Fact Sheet

WHAT THE SAT MEASURES

The SAT[®] tests what students have learned in school and how well they can apply that knowledge. The SAT also tests crucial critical thinking skills, which are necessary for success in college and beyond.

SAT questions are based on the same subjects that are taught every day in high school classrooms, such as geometry, grammar, algebra, and critical reading. The SAT has evolved over time to ensure that it is relevant to what teachers are teaching in school and to the needs of colleges.

PURPOSE OF THE SAT

The SAT is one of the best predictors of college success. In fact, when combined with high school grades, the SAT is *the* best predictor of college success, with a high correlation between SAT scores and first-year college GPA.

The SAT is used for purposes beyond connecting students to college, such as determining placement into college courses, identifying scholarship recipients and, as in Maine, it may be used as a state's educational assessment. Each of these purposes has been confirmed as a valid use of the test.

THE SAT IS FAIR

The SAT is committed to being the fairest test possible. To accomplish this, the SAT is developed according to the most rigorous standards.

- Each SAT question goes through a series of at least four content reviews to be sure it is fair;
- Each question is reviewed by external subject area experts (math or English teachers) to ensure it reflects what students learn in school;
- Each question goes through a special sensitivity review process to avoid any stereotyping or disconcerting references; and
- Each question is pretested in a live "real test" setting, and any question that performs substantially differently for any gender or ethnic group is eliminated.

Numerous research studies, including those by researchers at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the University of Minnesota, validate the fairness of the SAT—that is, that the SAT does not unfairly disadvantage any particular group of students. Score gaps between different groups of students on the SAT reflect real differences in educational opportunity, differences also seen on many other measures of academic achievement.

USING THE SAT AS A STATE ASSESSMENT

The SAT has proven to strongly align with states' academic standards, as well as or better than any other college admissions test. Like all admissions tests, the SAT must be augmented to be used for NCLB purposes so that it fully covers state-specific standards.

WHY A STATE MIGHT USE THE SAT AS ITS STATE ASSESSMENT

Students who take the SAT tend to be motivated, college-bound students. They care about their performance on the test because, in addition to other factors, their scores are considered by college admissions officers.

Taking the SAT, as an initial step in the college admissions process, increases college-going rates. When the regular, national SAT was administered to all high school juniors in the state of Maine, there were double-digit percentage increases in the number of students enrolling in that state's universities.

Using the augmented SAT as a state test accomplishes two critical goals: It allows students to complete an official college admissions test while simultaneously acting as a valid benchmark of each student's achievements.

The SAT increases college readiness because it measures what students learn in the classroom as well as assesses their potential for college success and graduation.

In many states, the majority of high school students are already taking the SAT. In the six New England states, for example, at least two-thirds of the high school students have taken the SAT by the time they graduate. This means that students, parents, high schools, and colleges are already familiar with all aspects of the SAT, from the administration of the test to interpreting scores.

In addition, students who feel that the score they earn as juniors on the state-funded SAT does not reflect their ability will have many opportunities to retake the SAT on their own. Low-income students will have these same opportunities through the SAT Fee-Waiver Program, which waives the test fees for hundreds of thousands of low-income students each year, more fee waivers than any other testing program.

OTHER KEY FACTS

WHAT CONCERNS HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT USING THE SAT FOR THIS PURPOSE AND HOW HAS THE COLLEGE BOARD ADDRESSED THEM?

The first concern is that some students may not be as well prepared as others for the test. This concern can be adequately addressed by providing preparation components for all students. Such components could include state funding for the PSAT/NMSQT® administration and/or state funding of the SAT online practice course for all students. PLEASE NOTE: Although students should be familiar with the SAT, expensive commercial coaching has been shown to be ineffective. Contrary to the assertions of for-profit test-prep companies, research shows that short-term test-prep courses only raise student scores by very small amounts—comparable to the gains normally associated with simply taking the SAT again in a student's senior year.

The second concern is whether the SAT can be better aligned with the state's learning standards. This can be addressed in a straightforward manner by developing additional test questions to ensure a closer correlation between the SAT and the state standards. This is commonly referred to as augmentation.

The third concern is that the SAT would not be administered effectively. Experience elsewhere indicates that department of education staff and school personnel are creative, thoughtful, and professional in the way they have administered the test. Schools have provided incentives, usually breakfast and/or lunch, to maximize attendance at the Saturday-morning SAT testing. The Maine Department of Education has treated the SAT Saturday test administration like a regular school day, with bussing and a compensatory day off during the following week.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON QUESTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SAT?

Q. Is the SAT culturally or socioeconomically biased?

- A.** The SAT is a fair test that meets rigorous fairness standards.
- Each SAT question goes through a series of at least four content reviews to be sure it is fair;
 - Each question is reviewed by external subject area experts (math or English teachers) to ensure it reflects what students learn in school;
 - Each question goes through a special sensitivity review process to avoid any stereotyping or disconcerting references; and
 - Each question is pretested in a live “real test” setting, and any question that performs substantially differently for any gender or ethnic group is eliminated.

Score gaps between different groups of students on the SAT may reflect differences in educational opportunity, but they do not reflect any unfairness of the test. This is proven by extensive research.

Q. Can SAT scores be used to compare schools or states?

- A.** The College Board does not recommend that SAT scores be used to compare schools or states for two primary reasons: (1) Students self-select to take the SAT, so the proportion of students taking the SAT in a school or state can vary dramatically, and (2) differences exist in the student population from school to school or state to state. In Maine, all students are required to take the SAT; therefore, self-selection is not an issue. Regarding the second reason, the College Board encourages schools or states to compare their students’ SAT results to the results from the prior year in their own school or state.

Q. Is the SAT an aptitude test?

- A.** The SAT tests what students know and how well they can apply that knowledge. The SAT also tests crucial critical thinking skills, which are necessary for success in college and beyond.

SAT questions are based on the same subjects that are taught every day in high school classrooms, such as geometry, grammar, algebra, and critical reading. The SAT has evolved over time to ensure that it is relevant to what teachers are teaching in school and to the needs of colleges.

Q. Isn't the SAT only for college-bound students?

- A.** The SAT is an appropriate assessment for all students. The test measures what students have learned in school; with a design based on curriculum surveys of math and English teachers, and constructed with a variety of easy, medium, and difficult questions.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SAT

- A large number of disclosed test forms for practice are available, along with free online test practice tools.
- Free practice materials, including sample SAT questions and The Official SAT Question of the Day™
- A suite of enhanced feedback tools, including My SAT Online Score Report and the SAT Skills Map, both of which benefit students and educators by highlighting areas in which students can improve.
- Multiple forms of the test ensure high security standards and ample testing opportunities.
- Quick turnaround (19 days) for scoring and reporting.
- Superior levels of quality control (e.g., every answer sheet scanned twice, on different scanners at different times).

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