

Maine's SAT Initiative: Why the May Administration?

After careful consideration of multiple factors, the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) made the decision in 2007 to have third year high school students participate in the May administration (1st Saturday of the month) of the SAT. The May administration date was used in both 2007 and 2008.

Occasionally the MDOE receives requests from various school personnel asking the Department to consider moving the date of the state's official SAT administration from May to the March/April date that is part of the College Board calendar (the March/April Saturday moves throughout the two months). The reasons cited for the request typically include the proximity of Advanced Placement testing, SAT subject testing, junior prom, sporting events, and other end-of-school year functions.

The Department continues to weigh the pros and cons of such a change seriously as these requests are brought forward by educators seeking the best options for their students. To date, personnel at DOE, in consultation with educators in the field have determined that the advantages of the May date outweigh the disadvantages for the following reasons:

1. The May date provides students with the most academic preparation time prior to testing. The 2008 March/April date was March 1st while the 2008 May date was May 3rd. Maine students had the benefit of an additional two months of schooling before taking the exam. For a significant number of students, the Maine SAT Initiative administration is the only time they will sit for this test and it is especially important that these students have the benefit of the greatest amount of class work possible prior to the test.
2. The May SAT is a released form of the test as opposed to the March/April exam which is a secure form of the test. This means that using the May form allows students and teachers to examine the actual questions, correct answers, distracters and design of the test following administration. Faculty members can then look for patterns in student responses and modify instruction to enhance student understanding. No part of the March/April exam is released to the public.
3. The May administration date is typically outside of the snow and flu seasons. The March 1st SAT administration date this year was hampered by a vigorous snowstorm resulting in the closure of the vast majority of Maine's test centers scheduled to be open on that day. Early to mid-March is usually the height of the cold and flu season in our state.
4. The March/April date has scheduling conflicts of its own. School drama events, band, swimming and short-term foreign travel are but some of the activities scheduled by Maine high schools during this time frame.

In short, there is no "perfect Saturday" on which to schedule Maine's official SAT as there will always be conflicts of time and schedules. We at the MDOE have studied the issue deeply and believe that the May date offers the greatest number of benefits to the

greatest number of students and for this reason will continue with the May date for the foreseeable future. Our hope is that armed with the knowledge of this long term commitment to the first Saturday in May, local schools will be able to adjust their schedule of events to best serve their respective students.