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for immediate release, April 14, 2014

### THE “NEW, IMPROVED” 2016 MODEL SAT: “COSMETIC SURGERY” IGNORES TEST’S BASIC FLAWS

Later this week, the College Board will release details about its planned redesign of the SAT. According to the country’s leading advocate for SAT-optional admissions, however, the changes amount to “cosmetic surgery that fails to address the test’s fundamental weaknesses.”

National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) Public Education Director Bob Schaeffer said, “An admissions exam is supposed to predict college performance accurately and fairly while resisting high-priced coaching manipulation. The SAT has long fallen far short of these goals. None of the planned revisions fix any of the test’s basic flaws.”

“The SAT will remain a weak predictor of undergraduate success,” Schaeffer continued. “High school grades will continue to forecast students’ graduation chances more accurately. The exam will still under-predict the performance of females, students whose home language is not English, and older applicants. Well-to-do families will not stop buying their children ‘test prep steroids’ from \$1,200 intensive workshops and \$500 per hour tutors. SAT scores will remain a better measure of family income than of college readiness.”

“Rather than improve the measurement quality of the SAT, most of the upcoming adjustments seem designed to win back market share from the ACT and slow adoption of test-optional policies,” Schaeffer charged. In the nine years since the last revisions, the ACT overtook the SAT as the nation’s most popular admissions exam, and nearly 100 more colleges dropped testing requirements.

“The changes may make the SAT appear more consumer-friendly, but they do not make it a better test. Most of the revisions are marketing bells and whistles,” Schaeffer explained. These include:

- **Making the “Essay” Optional** -- This simply matches ACT policy. In fact, most admissions offices found the College Board’s time-limited writing sample to be useless. Barely 200 colleges and universities required applicants to submit such an “essay,” according to a recent survey.

- **Ending the “Guessing Penalty” for Wrong Answers** – Another move to match the ACT. The College Board had long opposed right-answer scoring on the SAT, even while using that system on its Advanced Placement Exams. SAT-takers will now have to learn to fill in one bubble on all questions even if they have no idea what the correct response is.

- **Aligning Exam Content with High School Curriculum and Eliminating “Obscure” Language** – More changes that make the SAT look like the ACT. A more important “mismatch” will continue: the SAT will remain a time-limited, primarily multiple-choice test. That is not a format students will regularly encounter in college, let alone life.

- **Offering Free Khan Academy Test-Prep Videos** – Conceding that SAT coaching works is a major change for the College Board. But free test-prep videos have been available for years on the Khan Academy website. Other firms, such as Number2.com and FreeTestPrep.com, also have long posted free and low-cost materials. Access to more videos will not undercut demand for personalized, pricey test prep. SAT tutors expect business to boom due to uncertainty about the revised exam.

- **Basing One Reading Passage on U.S. Founding Documents** – This patriotic initiative may disadvantage students from other countries. There is no sound measurement reason to preference excerpts from U.S. history rather than the writings of, say, Darwin.

Schaeffer concluded, “Admissions offices don’t need the SAT, ‘old’ or ‘new.’ A much better way to evaluate applicants already exists. A recent, major report found that test-optional policies promote academic quality while increasing enrollment of first-generation and other low-income students.”

The first administration of the revised SAT will be in March 2016. A database of more than 800 institutions that do not require ACT or SAT scores to make admissions decisions is online at:

<http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>