

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN NEXT TUESDAY'S SAT SCORE REPORT

On Tuesday, August 26, 2008 at 10am EDT, the College Board is holding a news conference to release average SAT scores from the high school class of 2008. Because of persistent questions about the value of the exam, most recently a College Board study demonstrating that the highly promoted, more expensive "new" SAT is no better a predictor of undergraduate grades than the test it replaced, the data will be closely scrutinized. Here are four major issues the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) will be tracking.

Did average SAT scores change significantly? If so, why? After years of steady increases, average Reading and Math scores plunged seven points for the class of 2006, the first for which data were based on the "new" SAT, and another four points for the 2007 high school class. The College Board rejected suggestions by high school guidance counselors that a "fatigue factor" from the extended length of the revised exam was the cause and insisted the SAT remained a "common yardstick." But the test-makers could not provide another plausible reason for the decline. SAT scores from the class of 2008 will indicate whether recent results were an aberration or a trend; either will require a credible explanation.

How was test volume affected? In the class of 2006, the number of high school graduates who took the SAT dropped for the first time in 15 years. In 2007, the increase in SAT-takers was much smaller than for its competitor, the ACT. Many attributed this shift in market share to the near 50% increase in the SAT's length (now 3 ¾ hours) and cost (\$43 for the class of 2007, recently hiked to \$45). This year, test-volume for the ACT grew by another 9%; how did the SAT compare? (A FairTest chart comparing year-by-year ACT/SAT registration data over the past two decades is available on request).

What was the impact for ethnic, gender and income groups? According to 2006 and 2007 data, the introduction of the "new" SAT did not fundamentally alter historic score differences among White, Asian, African American and Hispanic test-takers. Nor was there any change in the strong correlation between SAT scores and family income. The gender gap did narrow significantly, primarily due to the addition of the "Writing" component, as FairTest had predicted. Will these trends continue for the Class of 2008?

Will SAT controversies lead more schools to drop their admissions testing requirements? This year twenty more colleges and universities, including Wake Forest and Smith, adopted "test-optional" policies. That brings the total of accredited, bachelor-degree granting institutions which do not require ACT or SAT scores before admitting substantial numbers of their applicants to 760 (see <http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>).

Look for charts summarizing major SAT score data and trends, as well as a news release addressing the questions listed above, at <http://www.fairtest.org> once results are public.

Please feel to call me (239 395-6773) at any time to discuss SAT scores or other testing issues.

