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Immediately after the embargo, press materials will be available on the Web at www.collegeboard.com

College Board Announces Scores for New SAT[®] with Writing Section

A Word About Comparing States and Schools

Media and others often rank states, districts, and schools on the basis of SAT[®] scores despite repeated warnings that such rankings are invalid. The SAT is a strong indicator of trends in the college-bound population, but it should never be used alone for such comparisons because demographics and other nonschool factors can have a strong effect on scores. If ranked, schools and states that encourage students to apply to college may be penalized because scores tend to decline with a rise in percentage of test-takers. To illustrate the effect of that percentage, Table 3 lists states in order of participation.

Forty-eight percent of this year's 3.04 million high school graduates took the SAT, and nearly 81 percent of non-profit colleges and universities without open admissions policies use SAT scores in admissions. As a group, this year's population of 1,465,744 SAT takers nearly equals the number of freshmen entering four-year colleges.

The information presented in this press release is based on the number of students who responded to each corresponding question on the SAT Questionnaire, an optional questionnaire that most students complete when they register for the SAT. The number of students responding and the number not responding to each question are reported in the College-Bound Seniors Total Group Report, available at www.collegeboard.com/cbsrs06. (Reports will be available online beginning August 29, 2006.)

The following page includes information on the use of aggregate scores. Page 18 contains information on the appropriate use of SAT scores in college admissions and on the significance of score changes for schools and districts.

Using Aggregate Scores*

Educators, the media, and others should:

- Use aggregate scores in conjunction with other factors such as the number of courses taken in academic subjects, scores on other standardized tests, pupil/teacher ratios, teacher credentials, expenditures per student, participation rates, retention/attrition rates, graduation rates, and other outcome measures for:
 - Evaluation of the general direction in which education in a particular jurisdiction is headed,
 - Curriculum development;
 - Faculty staffing;
 - Student recruitment;
 - Planning for physical facilities;
 - Student services such as guidance and placement; and
 - Monitoring teacher development and curricular effectiveness over time.

- Not rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states solely on aggregate scores derived from tests that are intended primarily as a measure of individual students.

A Note on the Use of Aggregate SAT Data for 2006 Data

As measures of developed verbal and mathematical abilities important for success in college, SAT scores are useful in making decisions about individual students and assessing their academic preparation. Because of the increasing public interest in educational accountability, aggregate test data continue to be widely publicized and analyzed. Aggregate scores can be considered one indicator of educational quality when used in conjunction with a careful examination of other conditions that affect the educational enterprise.

However, it is important to note that many College Board tests are taken only by particular groups of self-selected students. Therefore, aggregate results of their performance on these tests usually do not reflect the educational attainment of all students in a school, district, or state.

Useful comparisons of students' performances are possible only if all students take the same test. Average SAT scores are not appropriate for state comparisons because the percentage of SAT takers varies widely among states. In some states, a very small percentage of the college-bound seniors take the SAT. Typically, these students have strong academic backgrounds and are applicants to the nation's most selective colleges and scholarship programs. Therefore, it is expected that the SAT verbal and mathematical averages reported for these states will be higher than the national average. In states where a greater proportion of students with a wide range of academic backgrounds take the SAT, and where most colleges in the state require the test for admission, the scores are closer to the national average.

In looking at average SAT scores, the user must understand the context in which the particular test scores were earned. Other factors variously related to performance on the SAT include academic courses studied in high school, family background, and education of parents. These factors and others of a less tangible nature could very well have a significant influence on average scores.

* From *Guidelines on the Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data*. © 2002 The College Board. All rights reserved.



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College Board Announces Scores for New SAT[®] with Writing Section

Washington, D.C.— The College Board announced SAT[®] scores today for the class of 2006, the first to take the new version of the SAT featuring a writing section.

“We’re pleased that we now have a cohort of students who have taken the new writing section of the test. The addition of writing has made the SAT a better measure of the skills students need to succeed in college and later in life. We will continue to work with schools and colleges to encourage high standards and a greater focus on writing in the classroom,” said Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board.

Females outscored males on the writing section, which consists of a multiple-choice portion and an essay. The average writing score for all was 497. Females scored an average of 502, 11 points higher than males, who scored an average of 491. A stronger female performance in writing was evident across every racial/ethnic group.

For the class of 2006, overall combined scores for mathematics and critical reading dropped by seven points from last year, which represents less than 1 percentage point.

- Mathematics scores dipped by 2 points to 518, returning to the level of two years ago. Both male and female mathematics scores declined by 2 points to 536 and 502, respectively.
- Average critical reading scores decreased 5 points to 503. The critical reading score decline was more pronounced among males. Male scores declined by 8 points to 505; female scores by 3 points to 502.
- The 2-point drop in the average mathematics score represents approximately one-fifth of one test question on the SAT; the 5-point drop in the average critical reading score represents approximately one-half of one test question.

SAT Snapshot

- 785,019 (54 percent) of SAT takers are female and 680,725 (46 percent) are male.
- Thirty-eight percent of SAT takers in the class of 2006 are minorities, up very slightly (0.2 percent) over last year, and the largest percentage of any class of SAT takers to date.
- Thirty-five percent of SAT takers are first-generation college students. Fifty-eight percent of first-generation college students are female. This female dominance is true for all the racial/ethnic groups.
- Females closed the combined gap with males from 42 to 26 points. The gap decreased in large part because of the addition of writing, in which females outperformed males by 11 points. Females also closed the gap in critical reading and held steady in math.
- There were greater declines in critical reading for males than for females across all ethnic groups. In addition, females outperformed males in writing across all ethnic groups.
- Students for whom English is a second language increased 5 points in critical reading and 2 points in math.
- Forty-three percent of 2006 college-bound seniors reported grade averages of A+, A, or A-. Ten years ago, the figure was 36 percent, and in 1987, the first year these data were collected in the same manner, the figure was 27 percent. This year’s average grade point average was 3.33, compared with an average GPA of 3.21 in 1996 and 3.07 in 1987.

Score Decline Factors

“When a new test is introduced, students usually vary their test-taking behavior in a variety of ways and this affects scores,” Caperton said.

The most significant factor in the overall decline is mainly attributable to a change in student test-taking patterns, according to the College Board. The most notable change in test-taking behavior involved a decrease in retesting. Typically, students who take the test a second time see a 30-point increase on their combined score. Much of the score difference this year can be attributed to this decline in the number of students retaking the test and gaining the advantage of a score increase.

Research has shown that fatigue is not a factor. A College Board analysis of the performance of more than 700,000 test-takers on the critical reading and mathematics sections during the spring and fall 2005 SAT administrations showed no difference in student performance. There was no difference in either number of items correct or number of items omitted, between sections that appeared early in the test and sections that appeared later in the test.

Subgroup Differences in Mathematics, Critical Reading, and Writing

ESL: Students for whom English is a second language increased 5 points in critical reading to 467 and 2 points in mathematics to 523. They scored 469 on the writing section. Although this is 28 points below the mean for all students, it is a smaller gap than these students experienced for critical reading. More ESL students took the SAT this year.

Race/Ethnicity: African American and Mexican American critical reading scores, 434 and 454 respectively, improved over last year by one point each. American Indian mathematics scores improved by 1 point to 494 and Mexican American mathematics scores improved over last year by 2 points to 465. The largest declines in critical reading were seen among White and Other Hispanic students, both down by 5 points to 527 and 458, respectively.

Male/Female: Males experienced a greater score decline than females in critical reading across all ethnic groups. In addition, males outscored females in critical reading in all ethnic groups except for African American in which females scored 7 points higher than males. Furthermore, males outscored females across all ethnic groups in mathematics. Conversely, females outperformed males in writing across all ethnic groups.

“It is heartening to see that ESL students and their teachers increased student scores in critical reading and math and focused a lot of energy on the new SAT writing section,” Caperton said. “We’re pleased to see that the subgroup gaps, while still significant, are narrowing. Clearly for all of our students, though, American education must do a better job of developing literacy skills so that students achieve their full potential in an increasingly global world.”

Student Performance on Essay

The essay asked students to respond to a point of view on an issue through an original first-draft format and support a position with reasoning and examples taken from reading, studies, experience, or observations. Two readers scored each essay, each reader providing a score from 1 to 6 for a maximum score of 12. The average essay score was 7.2 out of 12. Reader agreement on essay scores was very high. Nearly 97 percent of readers exactly agreed on scores or differed by only one point. Only 3 percent of essays needed to be resolved by a third reader.

The College Board performed analyses on 6,498 essays randomly sampled from the March 2005 through January 2006 SAT administrations. Results demonstrated that longer essays were more likely to receive higher scores; however, the relationship between length and score was only moderate (.62). Eighty-four percent of essay responses reached the second page. Half the essays used the first-person voice. Score differences were slight, with first-person-voice essays averaging a score of 6.9, compared to 7.2 for those not using first-person voice. Only 8 percent of essays were identified as using the typical five-paragraph essay structure. Fifty-three percent of essays used academic examples (historical, literary/art/music, science or technology, and current events or politics) and 52 percent of essays included some type of personal experience as supporting evidence. Some students used both types of examples.

“It was really a pleasure to read through samples of student essays because they were so varied and personal,” Caperton said. “They provided an inspiring glimpse into how these young people solve problems and use writing to express their ideas.”

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Essay Subscores

- Fewer than 1 percent of students scored a 12.
- Average score was 7.2 out of 12.
- Females scored an average of 7.4 and males an average of 7.1
- Only 3 percent of essays needed to be resolved by a third reader.

A Look at a Random Sampling

- Only 8 percent of essays were identified as using the typical five-paragraph essays.
- Half of all essays were written in the first-person voice and received an average score of 6.9 versus 7.2 for all others.
- 15 percent of essays were written in cursive, while the other 85 percent were printed. Essays written in cursive received a slightly higher score (7.2 for cursive, compared to 7.0 for those printed).