

DELIVERING OPPORTUNITIES 2020

Executive Summary

For more than a century, College Board has dedicated itself to getting young people the education they need and deserve. The pandemic of 2020 has made that mission more crucial—and more difficult—than ever. The massive disruption of daily life has affected families and schools, deepened anxieties for students, and created new pressures for parents and teachers.

With so much stress and uncertainty, it's more important than ever that College Board helps students, especially vulnerable students, clear a path to college. And it's vital that everyone in education, from parents to policymakers, has clear insights into how students learn. We can't get better results if we don't measure results.

Our mission is to open more doors for more students, to help everyone find a college or training program that matches their interests and abilities. We believe the best way to help students achieve their goals beyond high school is to give them personalized career advice early, help them understand their potential and their pathways to success, and connect their interests to concrete steps they can take in high school. Our goal is to expand student access for all types of postsecondary opportunity, whether it's two-year, four-year, or trade and technical schools.

Through the SAT® Suite, we first connect with students in eighth grade and continue to monitor them every year until they apply, enroll, and graduate from college. For far too long, SAT results revealed that most students weren't prepared for college-level work or workforce training programs. That's why the SAT Suite of Assessments was designed to measure college readiness from grades 8–12, giving students time to prepare for a more promising path beyond high school.

Ideally, our work establishes a student's college readiness baseline in the eighth and/or ninth grade, then it offers clear feedback that can be used to diagnose learning gaps and recommend solutions. PSAT/NMSQT® and PSAT™ 10 in the 10th and/or 11th grade give students the chance to check their progress. Results throughout the SAT Suite can be linked to Official SAT Practice through Khan Academy® to create free, personalized practice that has been shown to improve student learning. This puts students in a better position to take the SAT in the second half of their junior year, allowing time to develop a practice plan to strengthen college readiness skills and improve SAT performance by the fall of their senior year.

All students, regardless of background, can take steps to strengthen their skills, improve their scores, and increase their likelihood of going to college and earning a degree. This report contains promising strategies for expanding student opportunity.

Major Findings

Taking college readiness assessments early appears to improve scores, particularly for underrepresented students.

- This was the first year College Board could study a cohort that had access to the full SAT Suite of Assessments and initial results are promising: Students who regularly take assessments improve their scores and their college readiness rates, year over year. Eighth graders who take the PSAT™ 8/9 are far more likely to come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds than students taking the assessments in higher grades.

The percentage of 10th-grade PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10 test takers who are on track for college and career readiness has remained relatively stable since 2016-17.

- The percentage of 10th-grade PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10 test takers who were on track for college and career readiness doesn't differ substantially from that observed in ninth-grade PSAT 8/9 test takers. We continue to see this as a call to action to find ways to increase readiness at this grade level.

The percentage of 11th-grade PSAT/NMSQT test takers on track for college and career readiness increases noticeably compared to 10th-grade test takers.

- The college readiness rates of 11th-grade students compared to their 10th-grade cohort counterparts in the last four years are 3–6 percentage points higher overall but are substantially flat for underrepresented minority student cohorts over this period.

When we track students who took an SAT Suite assessment each year from 2015 through 2019, we see a steady upward trend in average scores as well as an increase in the number of students meeting or exceeding both the Math and the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section benchmarks.

- The college readiness rates of the cohort of students who took the SAT Suite starting in 2015 increased from 38% to 45% in four years. We also see increases in readiness for most racial/ethnic groups in this period.

More low-income students are taking the SAT than ever before.

- The primary goal of SAT School Day is to help lower-income and underrepresented students get into the college-going pipeline earlier, connect them to higher education options earlier, and give them more time to develop and strengthen their college readiness skills. Through spring 2019, over 3.7 million students in more than 3,000 school districts and 9,000 schools have participated in SAT School Day. Moreover, Hispanic and Black students now participate at *much higher* rates than White students.

State and district policies have expanded the use of the SAT Suite of Assessments.

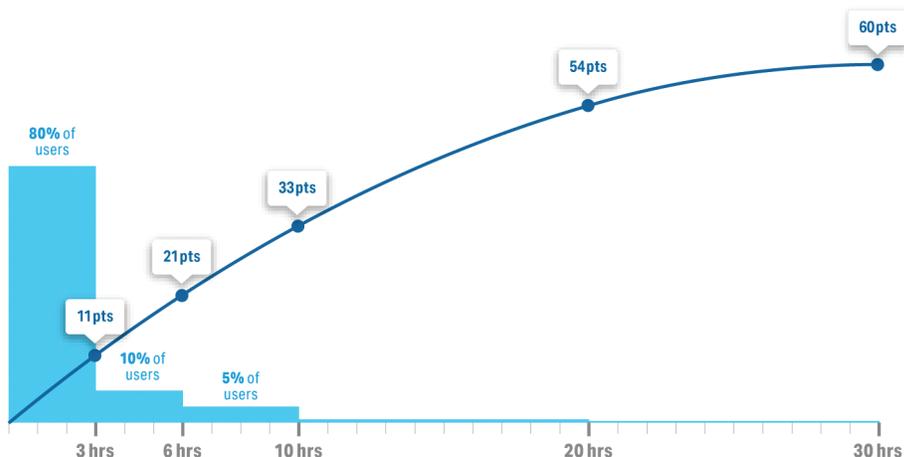
- The use of the SAT Suite of Assessments has dramatically increased through changes in state and district policies. The SAT Suite is used as accountability assessments, as college readiness measures, as college and career readiness indicators in accountability, as an alternative for high school graduation, and to trigger advanced opportunities for students.

Research has shown that when a college entrance examination is given to all students, we see the four-year college-going rates increase, higher enrollment in institutions with higher BA completion rates, and students from underrepresented backgrounds benefitting the most.

- Four independent research studies show that after the introduction of college entrance examinations administered to all students, four-year college-going rates increased as much as 10%, students were more likely to attend colleges with higher completion rates, and underrepresented students, particularly lower-income and students from rural areas, tended to benefit the most—with higher college enrollment rates, for example.

There is a positive association between time spent on Official SAT Practice (OSP) and composite SAT scores. Six hours of practice is associated with an additional 21 points on the SAT, regardless of demographics, based on a national sample of SAT test takers.

- The figure below shows the additional SAT score points associated with OSP time in hours when we control for gender, race/ethnicity, PSAT/NMSQT scores, and parental education. Students who linked their College Board account to OSP but spent no time practicing earned a mean SAT score of 1099, compared to students who did not link their account who scored an average SAT score of 1053. The average SAT score associated with spending six hours on practice was 1120, a 21-point improvement. Unfortunately, only 10% of students in the model spent more than six hours on OSP. These findings hold true regardless of student demographics.

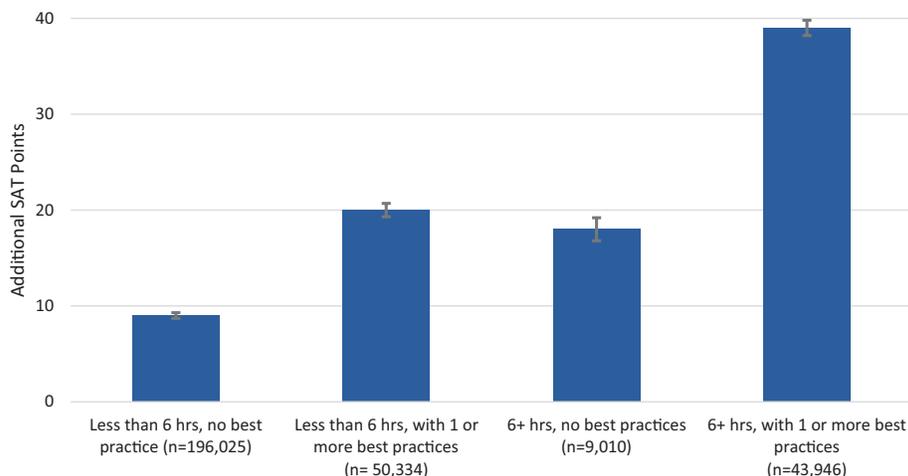


Note: The percentages in the figure do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Three best practices have emerged from research to help students get the most out of the time spent practicing in Official SAT Practice.

- We see from research on students nationally that at least three best practice behaviors can help students get the most out of their practice: (1) following skill recommendations; (2) completing a full-length practice test particularly between taking the PSAT/NMSQT and their first SAT; and (3) leveling up skills through practice in 15 or more skills.

- We examined whether students who engaged in these best practices attained better outcomes on the SAT than students who did not when we control for student attributes and PSAT/NMSQT test scores. The figure below shows the additional SAT points associated with each of four categories: students who spent less than 6 hours on OSP but didn't do a best practice behavior; students who spent less than six hours and did at least one best practice; students who spent at least six hours but didn't do a best practice; and students who spent at least six hours on OSP and did at least one best practice. Students who spent at least six hours on OSP and did a best practice scored an average of 39 points higher on the SAT than students who didn't spend any time on OSP. These findings hold true regardless of student demographics.



Note: The "I" at the top of the bar graphs represents the standard error of estimate.

About 91% of the nearly 200,000 students who used our career exploration tool completed their interest road map, with 27% discovering at least one career that interests them. The most popular career is registered nurse, followed by surgeon and pediatrician.

- Five of the top 10 careers saved by students as part of their interest road map are healthcare related, and fewer than 4% of all careers saved were nursing jobs. In a survey, we found that students have a strong interest in learning more about different college- and career-related goals and majors, as well as understanding which training programs and employers might be a good fit for them.

Retaking the SAT increases college access, especially for low-income and underrepresented students.

- Students who retake the SAT tend to have substantial increases in scores and see up to a 33 percentage point increase in four-year college enrollment, thereby reducing the four-year college enrollment gap 10% by race/ethnicity and 20% by income.

More students are finding more scholarship opportunities through the SAT Suite of Assessments.

- College Board has greatly expanded awareness of the many scholarships available to low-income students through our 19 scholarship partners, including our longstanding partner National Merit Scholarship Corporation, the College Board Opportunity Scholarships (CBOS), and College Board Recognition Programs. In 2019 alone, over

\$74M was awarded to students through our scholarship partners, \$4.6 M was awarded through CBOS, and, in 2020, three new recognition programs, in addition to the National Hispanic Recognition Program, were launched. The message is being heard.

Fee waivers improve college access for low-income students.

- Nearly all students granted fee waiver benefits use one or more of them. That's good news, but not good enough because too many students still aren't taking full advantage of the opportunities available to them. College Board reached many more eligible students this year, thanks in large part to greater connections through School Day. The overall percentage of the past 10 public school graduating classes who had access to one or more SAT tests at no personal cost has risen steadily from 23% in the class of 2010 to roughly 60% in the past three years. Despite these increases, we can't rest until every student accesses the fee waivers available to them.

AP courses are a valuable tool for students that strengthen college readiness.

- AP® and Pre-AP® courses help students develop skills and routines that allow them to tackle college-level work. In a study in West Virginia, students who take at least one AP Exam score higher on all three components of the SAT Essay, particularly on the analysis component, compared to students who take no AP Exams at all. This indicates that the skills students build while engaged in an AP curriculum are highly transferable to the type of writing skills they will need in college, as measured by the SAT Essay.

Small nudges can change students' trajectories by encouraging students with potential to take AP courses and assessments.

- Yet another barrier coming down: in a randomized controlled study, teachers and students received letters, emails, and other communications encouraging students to take AP courses for which they had potential. Those students in urban high schools who received an intervention were 5%–6% more likely to take a matched AP Exam compared to students who didn't receive outreach.

Next Steps

Many of College Board's efforts to deliver more opportunities for more students show promise, but the results tell us that we need to do more.

Here are some of the major challenges we are addressing:

- There are still far too many high school graduates who are likely to need some sort of remediation in either reading/writing or math, or both, when they enter college. In the class of 2019, for example, 32% will likely need remediation in reading/writing, 52% in math, and 30% in both areas. This isn't acceptable.
- With 55% of our 2019 high school graduates unprepared for success in a traditional bachelor's program, these students deserve more opportunities to help them clear a path to enter career training programs and successfully pursue productive careers. Sadly, there is little support today to guide these students to these pathways, yet we desperately need these students to be trained to be productive workers in our workforce. How can we deliver opportunities to these students so that they can clear a path to these postsecondary career pathways?

- Only one-third of 8th-grade PSAT 8/9 test takers are on track for college and career readiness, a number that increases only to 45% by the time students take the SAT and are ready to graduate from high school. These numbers are far too low. We must find efficacious ways of increasing college readiness by the end of high school.
- The college readiness rates of 10th-grade PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10 test takers haven't shown sustained improvement in the last four years. We need to better understand why these rates are stalled and to find ways to improve them.
- While independent studies have found that universal college entrance examinations, when provided to students at no cost, result in higher four-year college-going rates, especially for lower-income students and students from rural areas, we still see fewer low-income and rural students enrolling in college. How can we help traditionally underrepresented students achieve college success rates similar to those of more advantaged students?
- Our research tells us students who engage in one or more best practices as they prepare for college and for the SAT experience greater score gains, and this is true regardless of race, ethnicity, and parental education levels. How can we ensure that all students know about these best practices?
- Students tell us that they have a strong interest in learning more about different college- and career-related goals and majors and about training programs and employers who might be a good fit for them. How can we help these students connect their educational goals to their employment and careers?
- Students aren't taking advantage of the scholarship opportunities available to them. College Board reached many more eligible students this year, but we won't be satisfied until every student knows what's available.
- Small nudges can encourage students who have potential to succeed if they take AP courses and assessments. How can we bring this sort of successful intervention to scale so that all students can have this opportunity to succeed?