

## In Austin, College Board Announces Major SAT Changes

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The SAT, a standardized test that for many students is an intimidating hurdle to clear en route to college admissions, is about to undergo a major redesign. Among the changes being announced by the College Board in Austin on Wednesday: The test will revert to a 1,600-point scale, and the essay portion will be optional and scored separately.

According to the Texas Education Agency, more than 182,000 Texas public high school students took the SAT, the ACT (another test used in college admissions developed by ACT Inc.) or both exams in 2011, the most recent year for which data is available. That total represents nearly 69 percent of all public high school graduates in Texas.

David Coleman, the president of the College Board, the nonprofit that develops and publishes the test each year, said in remarks provided to The Texas Tribune ahead of Wednesday's announcement that such standardized tests can create "unproductive anxiety" for students and lead to expensive private test prep and coaching that "reinforces privilege rather than merit."

"It is time to admit that the SAT and ACT have become disconnected from the work of our high schools," he said.

In 2005, the College Board added an essay section to the SAT, taking it from a 1,600-point scale to a 2,400-point scale. In his prepared remarks, Coleman said that "a single brief timed essay has not historically proved predictive of college success."

Among the many changes that will take effect in 2016, the essay portion will be optional and scored separately, and the SAT will revert to a 1,600-point scale. The decision of whether to require the essay will be left to individual colleges and school districts. Coleman said quality writing would still be emphasized on the test in the reading and writing section, though it would be more evidence-based and require students to support their answers.

Other changes include a new emphasis on testing commonly used vocabulary words whose meanings depend on context. "Today, when we say that someone has used an SAT word, it often means a word you have not heard before and are not likely to soon hear again," Coleman said in his prepared remarks. "The redesigned SAT will instead focus on words students will use over and over again, that open up worlds to them."

In the reading section, students can expect an added emphasis on passages from scientific and historical sources, including a guarantee that each exam will include a passage from one of the country's founding

documents or from what Coleman called "the great global conversation." He cited addresses given by Abraham Lincoln, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Martin Luther King Jr. as possible sources.

The math portion of the test will now include a portion in which calculators, which are currently permitted for the whole section, are prohibited. It will also focus on narrower topics — described in a College Board press release as "problem solving and data analysis; the heart of algebra; and passport to advanced math" — that Coleman suggested will most contribute to a student's college and career readiness.

"No longer will the SAT only have disconnected problems or tricky situations students won't likely see again," he said.

Additional changes include offering the test in a digital form, as well as on paper, and a new scoring system that does not deduct points for incorrect responses. Currently, students lose a quarter of a point for wrong answers, but no points for omitted responses. Moving forward, they will simply receive credit for correct answers.

According to TEA data, the participation rate in SAT or ACT testing for economically disadvantaged students in Texas was less than 60 percent in 2011. For non-disadvantaged students, it was more than 72 percent. Along with the upcoming tweaks to the test, the College Board also announced new policies that will seek to address such inequities nationwide.

In an effort to level the playing field heading into the day of the exam, the College Board has partnered with Khan Academy, which provides free online educational videos, to make test preparation materials available for free online.

Another plan, Coleman said, stemmed from the realization that most students in the lowest income quartile who perform well on the SAT still do not apply to selective colleges. The College Board is committing to offering every income-eligible student who takes the SAT — regardless of performance — four waivers for college admission fees.

"We do not want to slow students down," he said. "We want to propel them forward."

Coleman also announced that the College Board is launching a prize program for the best student analytical writing, as well as a partnership with *The Atlantic* to publish the prizewinners' work. Coleman conducted an interview with Lyndon B. Johnson biographer Robert Caro on the topic of analytical writing earlier in the day at the SXSWedu festival in Austin. Caro was expected to be on hand for Wednesday's announcement, as was Sal Khan, the founder of Khan Academy.

The complete details on the new exam and sample test items are expected to be released on April 16.