

Retesting and the New SAT for the Class of 2006

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Background

The College Board administered the new SAT for the first time in March 2005 (College Board, 2005). The new SAT is longer and contains different test content than the old SAT. The College Board expected that students' scores on the new critical reading and math subtests would be same, on average, as the scores students would have earned on the old verbal and math subtests, respectively (College Board, 2005, 2006b; Kobrin & Schmidt, 2005; Liu, Feigenbaum, & Dorans, 2005). Yet, nationally, the SAT scores for the Class of 2006 are lower than for the Class of 2005 (College Board, 2006a; Jasick, 2006; Marklein, 2006a, 2006b; Matthews, 2006; Pope, 2006).

One hypothesis proposed to explain some of the score decline is that the Class of 2006 took the SAT less frequently than did previous cohorts (College Board, 2006b). Historically, students who take the SAT a second time improve their combined verbal/critical reading and math score by an average of 25 to 30 points (College Board, 2006a; Nathan & Camara, 1998; Von Secker, 2006). A large decrease in repeat test taking could account for a decline of several points in average SAT scores for the Class of 2006 (College Board, 2006a).

One purpose of this research brief is to examine whether the SAT retest patterns of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Class of 2006 are similar to those observed nationally. In addition, this research brief describes why some students in the MCPS Class of 2006 decided to take the SAT one time only.

Methodology

Nationally, most students who take the SAT for the first time at the end of their junior year also took the SAT again by January of their senior year (College Board, 2006b). The students selected for this analysis were those in the MCPS Classes of 2002 through 2006 (as of May 2006) who took the SAT for

the first time in spring of Grade 11. This sample provides the best comparison with the nation.

Preliminary analysis indicated that students in the MCPS Class of 2006 were retesting less frequently than prior classes. Based on that evidence, MCPS staff developed an interview protocol for gathering information about the repeat test taking patterns of the MCPS Class of 2006. High school counselors collected interview data from 1,311 (96.5%) of the 1,353 students who took the SAT for the first time in March, May, or June 2005 (new SAT) and did not take the SAT again.

Results

Retest Patterns

The MCPS Class of 2006 was less likely than the MCPS Classes of 2002 to 2005 to take the SAT more than one time, regardless of how well students performed on their first SAT administration (Figure 1). The decrease in retesting observed for the MCPS is consistent with the national decrease reported by the College Board (2006a).

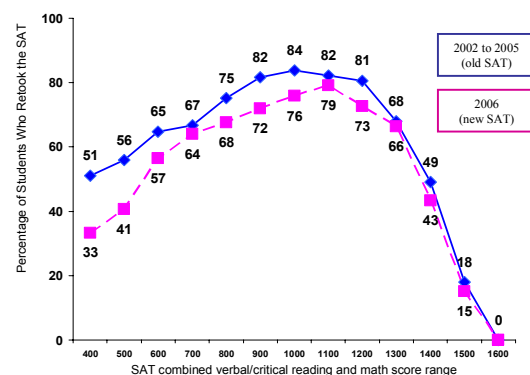


Figure 1. Percentage of students in the MCPS Classes of 2002 to 2006 who took the SAT for the first time in March, April, May or June of Grade 11 and then retested by January of Grade 12 by SAT combined verbal/critical reading and math score range.

Explanation of the Decline in SAT Retesting

MCPS asked 1,311 one-time SAT test takers in the Class of 2006 who took the new SAT for the first time in the spring of their junior year why they did not take the SAT a second time

More than two thirds (69.3%) of interviewed students reported that they did not take the SAT again because they were satisfied with their first score (Table 1). Two reasons students gave for their satisfaction with their scores were that the scores met their personal SAT goals and that the scores were high enough for them to gain admission to the college of their choice.

About 18% of interviewed students (234) reported that they took an alternative college admissions test (Table 1). A review of MCPS records for the Class of 2006 confirmed that about one half of the interviewed students (110) who chose to take an alternative college admissions test took the ACT. ACT participation was highest among students with SAT combined scores of 900 or higher.

Table 1
SAT Score Satisfaction of Students in the MCPS Class of 2006 Who Took the SAT for the First Time in Spring of Grade 11 and Did Not Retest by SAT Score Range

SAT Critical Reading/Math Score Range	N Scores	% Satisfied with First SAT Score	% Took Alternative Test
All Students	1311	69.3	17.8
Below 900	258	43.4	23.6
900 to 1090	327	58.1	20.8
1100 to 1290	321	75.1	12.5
1300 or Higher	405	90.1	16.0

Note: The sum of the percentages can be greater than 100 because students identified all the reasons they did not retest.

More than 23% of students with combined SAT scores below 900 chose to take an alternative college admissions test rather than take the SAT again (Table 2). Review of the student interview data confirmed that many students with combined SAT scores below 900 took an Accuplacer instead of another SAT.

Of all students interviewed, 15.7% reported that the new SAT is too long and 10% reported that the new SAT is too difficult (Table 2). Dissatisfaction with the length and content of new SAT was highest among students with combined critical reading/math scores below 1100. About 20% of all students with

combined critical reading/math scores below 1100 reported that they did not take the test again because the SAT is too long. Nearly one fourth (24.4%) of students with combined scores below 900 reported that the new SAT is too difficult.

Table 2
SAT Test Satisfaction of Students in the MCPS Class of 2006 Who Took the SAT for the First Time in Spring of Grade 11 and Did Not Retest by SAT Score Range

SAT Critical Reading/Math Score Range	N Scores	% Said New SAT is Too Long	% Said New SAT is Too Difficult
All Students	1311	15.7	10.0
Below 900	258	19.4	24.4
900 to 1090	327	19.3	12.5
1100 to 1290	321	13.4	6.2
1300 or Higher	405	12.3	1.7

Note: The sum of the percentages can be greater than 100 because students identified all the reasons they did not retest.

The new SAT is more expensive than the old SAT. However, only 0.1% (2 students) indicated that cost was the only reason they did not take the SAT again.

Score Improvement on the New SAT

Although the old and new versions of the SAT verbal/critical writing and math tests are different, the expected improvement upon retesting is 25 to 30 points for both tests (Von Secker, 2006). On average, students in the Classes of 2005 (old SAT) and 2006 (new SAT) who took the SAT for the first time in spring of Grade 11 improved their SAT combined verbal/critical reading and math scores by 28 and 25 points, respectively, when they retested (Table 3). Had more students in the Class of 2006 taken the SAT again, the average mean score for all students would have been a few points higher.

Table 3
Changes in the Mean SAT Scores of Students in the MCPS Classes of 2005 and 2006 Who Took the SAT for the First Time in Spring of Grade 11 and Retested by January of Grade 12

Graduating Class	Mean SAT Combined Verbal/Critical Reading and Math Score		Mean Score Change ^a
	1 st SAT	2 nd SAT	
Class of 2005	1087	1115	+28
Class of 2006	1093	1117	+25

^a Average improvement in combined verbal/critical reading and math score when student took the SAT the second time.

Discussion

Students who took the new SAT again improved their scores by the same increment observed on the old SAT. However, students in the Class of 2006 who took the new SAT were less likely to retake the SAT than were students in previous graduating classes who took the old SAT. The decrease in repeat testing by the Class of 2006 could contribute to a decrease of several points in district mean SAT scores compared with the Class of 2005.

Some of the decline in retesting may be due to an increase in the test length and students' perceptions that the new test is too difficult. About one half of the students with combined critical reading and math scores below 1100—a group who in past years was likely to take the SAT again—reported that they were satisfied with their initial scores. The change in student satisfaction with lower scores could be due to students' perceptions that the benefit of score improvement was outweighed by test burden.

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