

State of College Admission: Factors in the Admission Decision Fact Sheet

For the Fall 2023 admission cycle, NACAC member four-year colleges reported that the most important factors in admission decisions were grades in high school courses and strength of the high school curriculum.

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2023

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
High school grades in college prep courses	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Total high school grades (all courses)	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of high school curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Positive character attributes	184	28.3	37.5	18.5	15.8
Essay or writing sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's interest in attending	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor recommendation	185	11.9	40.0	27.6	20.5
Teacher recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Extracurricular activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4
High school class rank	183	5.5	22.4	43.2	29.0
Admission test scores (ACT, SAT)	185	4.9	25.4	38.9	30.8
Portfolio	185	4.9	10.8	24.3	60.0
Interview	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Work	185	2.2	30.8	40.0	27.0
State graduation exam scores	185	1.6	6.5	18.4	73.5
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	185	1.1	22.2	25.9	50.8

Do the top factors in admission decisions vary by type of college?

Across all four-year colleges, high school grades and strength of high school curriculum are uniformly rated as the most important factors. However, some differences were found between public and private colleges in the level of importance given to the following factors:

- high school GPA in college prep courses
- strength of curriculum
- class rank
- positive character attributes
- the essay or writing sample
- the interview
- work
- extracurricular activities
- counselor and teacher recommendations
- student's interest in attending the institution.

How has the importance of admission factors changed over time?

The Fall 2023 survey represents NACAC’s first data collection since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent wide-spread adoption of test-optional or test-free admission policies.

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING “CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE” TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2012 TO FALL 2023

	2023	2020-2022	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
High school grades in college prep courses	77%	---	73%	71%	77%	---	79%	82%	82%
Total high school grades (all courses)	74	---	75	81	77	---	60	52	50
Strength of high school curriculum	64	---	62	51	52	---	60	64	65
Essay or writing sample	19	---	23	17	19	---	22	22	20
Student’s interest in attending	16	---	16	16	14	---	17	20	18
Counselor recommendation	12	---	15	11	15	---	17	16	16
Teacher recommendation	11	---	14	7	11	---	15	14	15
Extracurricular activities	7	---	6	4	8	---	6	10	7
Admission test scores (ACT, SAT)	5	---	46	52	54	---	56	58	56
Portfolio	5	---	6	5	6	---	7	6	5
High school class rank	5	---	9	9	9	---	14	15	13
Interview	4	---	6	4	5	---	4	8	7
State graduation exam scores	2	---	2	2	2	---	4	3	2
Work	2	---	4	2	3	---	1	3	1
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	1	---	6	4	7	---	7	8	5

How do individual student characteristics impact admission decisions?

Colleges and universities reported that individual student characteristics, such as first-generation status, gender, or ability to pay often have limited or no importance in admission decisions.

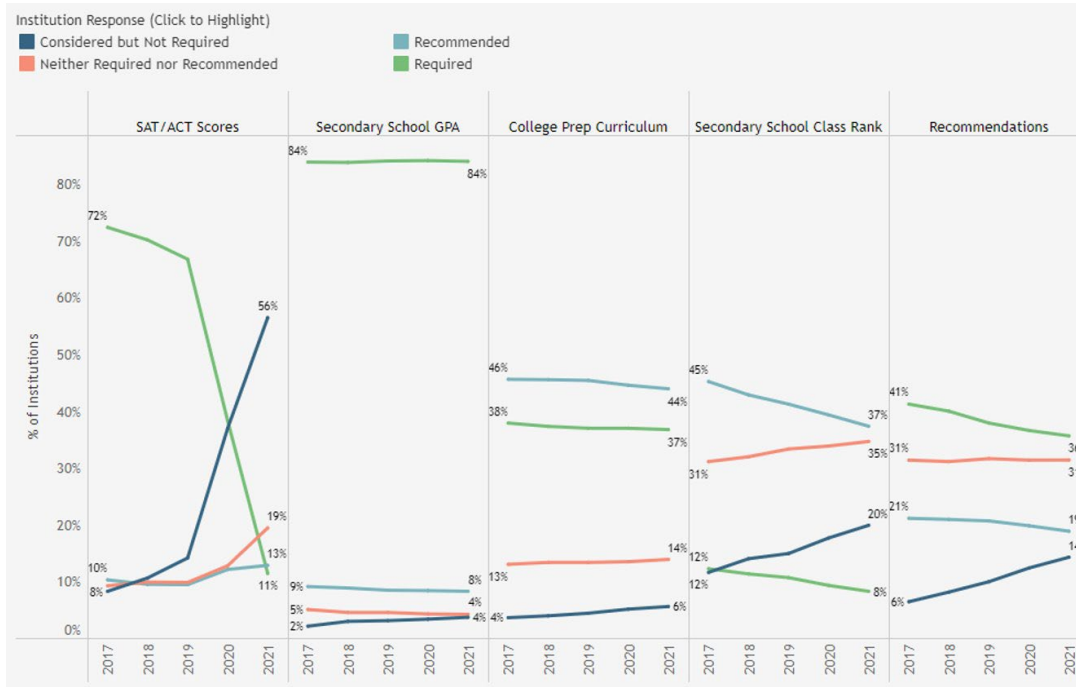
PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INFLUENCE TO STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, Fall 2023

	N	Considerable Influence	Moderate Influence	Limited Influence	No Influence
First-generation status	181	7.0	9.7	28.1	55.1
State or country of residence	185	7.0	9.7	28.1	55.1
Gender	180	2.8	9.4	12.8	75.0
High school attended	185	1.6	17.8	34.1	46.5
Ability to pay	185	1.6	7.6	13.0	77.8
Alumni relations	185	0.5	3.8	30.3	65.4

SOURCE: NACAC’s Factors in the Admission Decision Survey, Fall 2023

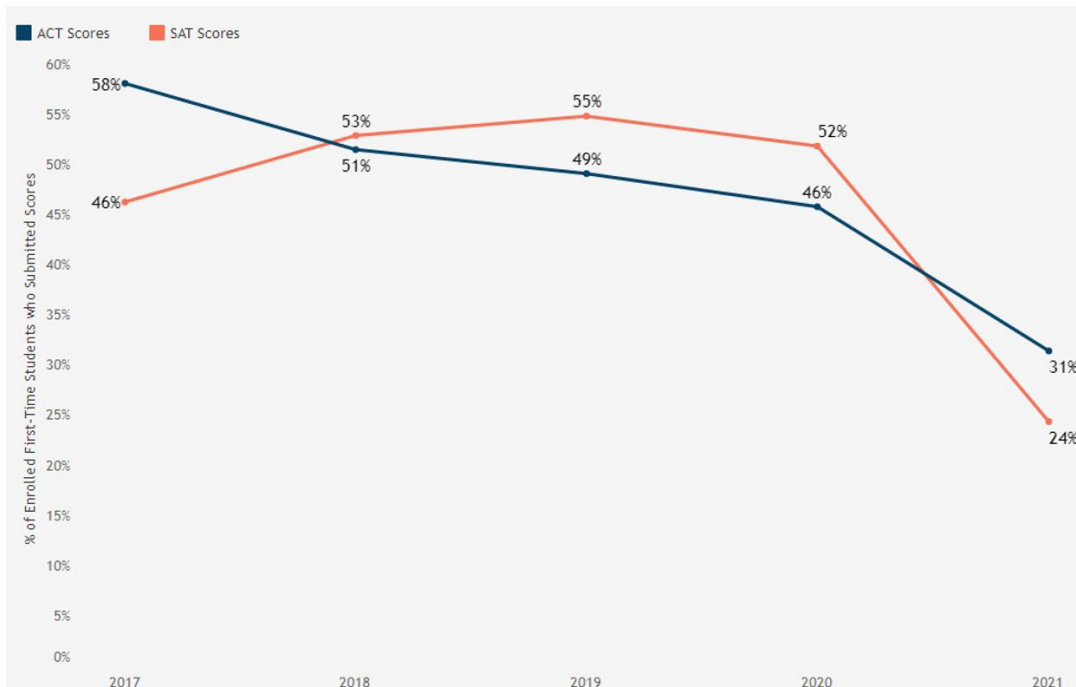
Admission data from 2017-2021 show that standardized test score requirement rates have sharply decreased, while secondary school grades remain a top requirement for college admission.

TRENDS IN ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS: FALL 2017-FALL 2021



Test score submission trends from Fall 2017-Fall 2021 show that significantly fewer enrolled first time college students submitted ACT or SAT scores in 2021 compared to previous years.

TEST SCORE SUBMISSION TRENDS: FALL 2017-FALL 2021

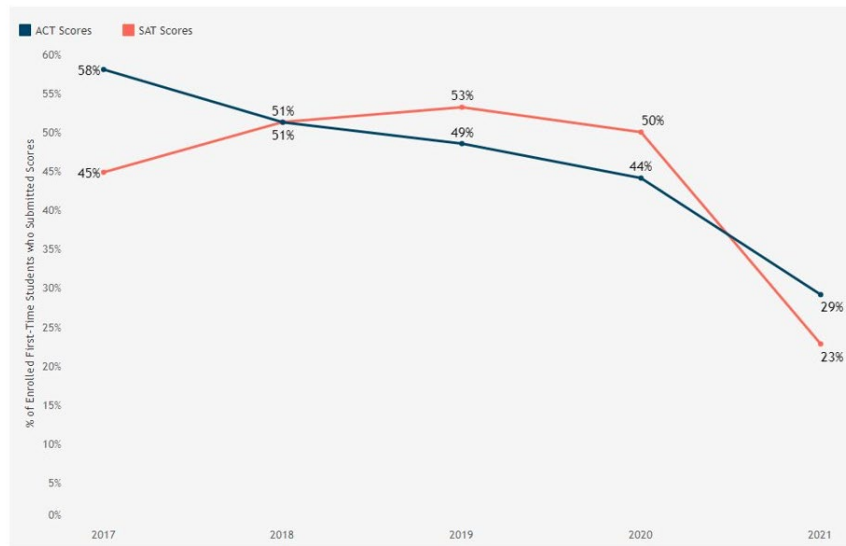


Is there a difference in test score submission trends by institution type?

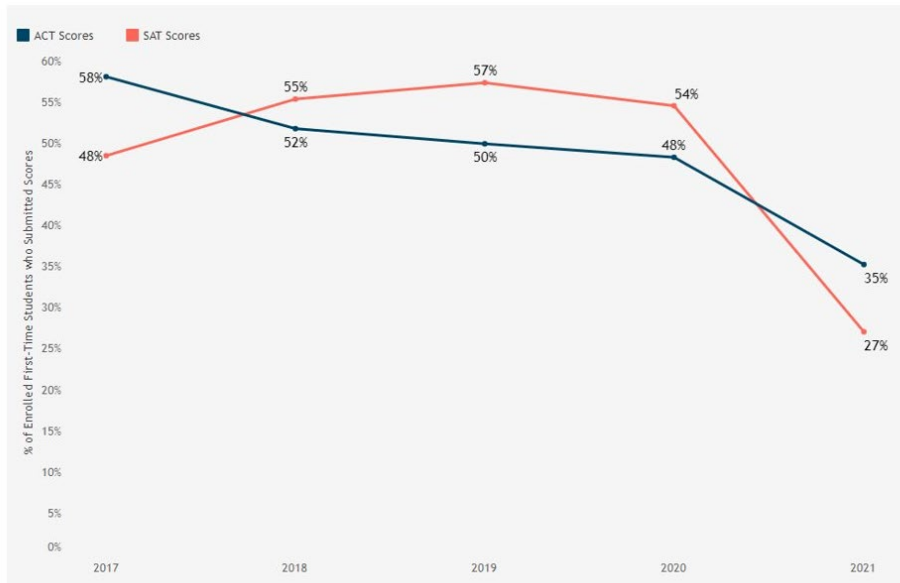
While both public and private institutions saw a decrease in the number of students submitting standardized test scores after the pandemic began, public colleges and universities saw higher rates of score reporting than private colleges and universities.

TEST SCORE SUBMISSION TRENDS BY INSTITUTION TYPE: FALL 2017-FALL 2021

Private Colleges and Universities

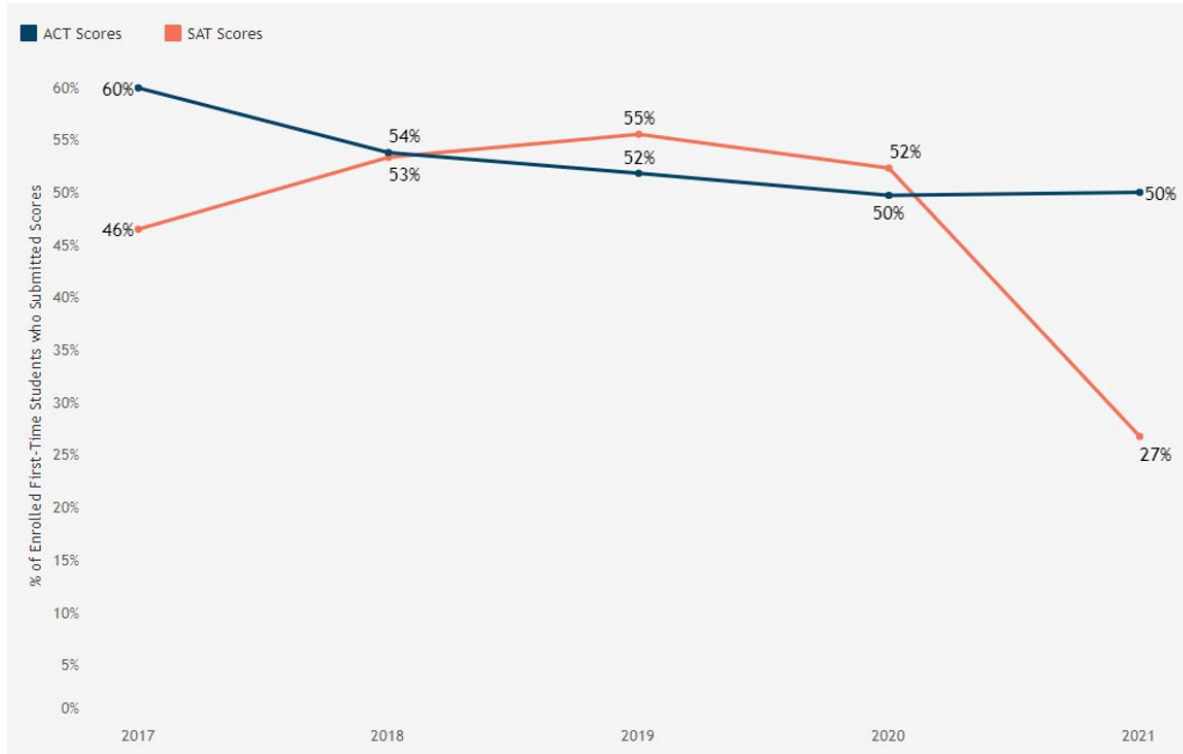


Public Colleges and Universities



For institutions that require standardized test scores for admittance, the number of SAT scores submitted decreased after the pandemic, while the number of ACT scores submitted stayed at similar rates to before the pandemic.

TEST SCORE SUBMISSION TRENDS FOR INSTITUTIONS THAT REQUIRE TESTS: FALL 2017-FALL 2021



SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017 – 2021). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center. Washington, DC: NCES.

Note: The group of colleges used for this analysis includes those that met the following criteria for the 2021 IPEDS data collection—four-year public or four-year private not-for-profit; degree-granting; accredited; Title-IV participating and military academies. Colleges with Carnegie classification “associates” or special-focus 2-year” were excluded. Colleges that were not open admission in *any* of the five years included in the analysis (2017-2021) also were excluded. These criteria resulted in a total number of 1,532 colleges.

Note: Fall 2021 percentages add to less than 100 because some colleges that indicated requiring tests reported a lower number of test submitters than their total fall enrollment. Although the cause for this is not indicated by the data, Fall 2021 was the first full admission cycle disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it’s possible that the discrepancy is related to test score submission exceptions that were made by colleges that officially required the tests.