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Five Things to Know About Colleges Reinstating the SAT

Elite colleges are tightening their test requirements after years of looser policies

By Douglas Belkin and Carl Churchill

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Yale University in New Haven, Conn. JOE BUGLEWICZ/BLOOMBERG

Colleges are rethinking test-optional admissions.

After a pandemic-era push to stop requiring standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, some schools are bringing them back. Others are under pressure to do so. Here are five things to know about what's happening with the SATs.

Most schools are test-optional, but lots of students still take the SAT

For years, the SAT was the gold standard of college-admission exams. Today, about 90% of colleges don't require the SAT or ACT, according to FairTest, which advocates against the exams.

Even though most schools don't require them, admissions officers often use submitted scores to assess candidates. The number of people taking the SAT has risen in recent years.

Test performance is falling

Fewer high-school students are meeting the SAT's math and reading benchmarks. Last year fewer than 40% of test-takers met the benchmarks, which are supposed to predict whether someone has a 75% chance of getting at least a C in a first-semester, college-level math, writing or history course.

High school grade inflation has risen

Test-requirement advocates say standardized exams have become a more-important evaluation tool because GPA has become less useful. High school GPAs were rising even before the pandemic, weakening their power to predict an applicant's success in college.

Elite schools are tightening entrance-exam policies

Yale recently announced it would require an SAT or ACT score after several years of a more flexible policy. MIT and Dartmouth have also reinstated test mandates in recent years. At the University of California, hundreds of professors wrote a letter last week urging the UC regents to reinstate entrance-exam requirements.

SAT scores have declined

The moves come as average SAT scores have fallen.

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Douglas Belkin covers higher education and national news out of the Chicago bureau.



Carl Churchill is a graphics reporter with The Wall Street Journal. He works primarily on issues relating to climate, ecology, and U.S. news. He joined the Journal after working for Woodwell Climate Research Center, a climate science organization based in Massachusetts. While there, he received recognition f...



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