

## West Hartford Public Schools

**Agenda Item:** SAT Redesign  
**Meeting Date:** December 2, 2014  
**From:** Dr. Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment  
**Through:** Tom Moore, Superintendent

### Background

The SAT was first designed in 1926, adapted from a World War I Army IQ test, the *Army Alpha*. The name of the test was officially changed from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (or S.A.T.) to simply the SAT in 1994 to draw some line of separation from its possibly less than idealistic history and away from any claims to measure aptitude or intelligence. The College Board now brands the SAT as one test among a suite of Scholastic Assessment Tests designed to gauge students' achievement and college preparedness. Each year, the SAT is taken by more than 1.6 million students worldwide. Approximately 85% of all West Hartford graduates participate in the SAT (approximately 39% for the ACT, i.e., American College Testing). The redesign of the SAT is being celebrated as a dramatic step toward alignment of high school curricula and college entrance examinations as well as a platform for social reform relative to opportunity gaps within college admissions among different groups of students.

### Summary

The redesign of the SAT is intended to provide for a better measure of college and career readiness through a closer alignment of test content to skills critical to college success and thus invariably secondary school curricula. The College Board identifies six critical areas it deems as prerequisite to success in post-secondary education:

- read, analyze, and use reasoning to comprehend challenging literary and informational texts;
- revise and edit extended texts across a range of academic and career-related subjects for expression of ideas and to show facility with a core set of grammar, usage, and punctuation conventions;
- show command of a focused set of knowledge, skills, and understandings in math and apply these in science, social studies, and career-related contexts;
- make careful and considered use of evidence in reading and writing;
- demonstrate skill in analyzing data represented graphically, or in tables and charts across a variety of contexts;
- reveal an understanding of relevant words in context and how word choice helps shape meaning and tone.

These critical skills form the basis of the core content and instructional shifts targeted within our curricular redesign efforts over the last three years and are very much in keeping with the spirit of the Common Core Standards movement.

**Agenda Item:  
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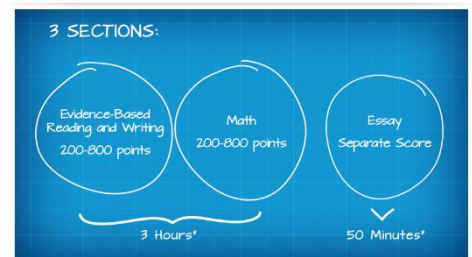
Within its redesign process, the College Board was responsive to long-held criticisms and concerns regarding the 88-year old assessment and sought feedback from the full range of stakeholders to include students, teachers, and colleges. Given its origins as an aptitude (vs achievement) test, the SAT has been long maligned for “tricky” questions, problems disconnected from secondary school curricula, and a complicated scoring mechanism that might require students to engage in risk analysis when answering questions they were less certain about. Test Prep companies provide “SAT tutoring” and test preparation seminars which focus as much on beating the test as learning the content and skills underlying the test. Within its redesign, the College Board saw the \$4.5 billion-a-year test-prep industry as a major contributor to an opportunity gap which positioned the SAT as a barrier to more attractive college options for less privileged students. Criticisms outlined in a 2008 report by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) motivated some colleges to move away from the SAT (and ACT) as part of the college admissions process, although an estimated 80 percent of four-year colleges still require the SAT or ACT. The College Board listened carefully to feedback from these groups and others and has made radical changes in its test design, scoring, and transparency of expectations. In addition, the College Board has cooperated with Khan Academy to provide SAT tutoring and test preparation for free to all students through an on-line format.

**A summary of changes in response to stakeholder feedback is described below.**

### **Curricular Alignment**

Within its 2008 report, the NACAC recommended that colleges and universities identify college placement examinations and criteria that are more closely linked to the high school curriculum, citing College Board’s AP exams and SAT II Subject Tests as better predictors of college readiness. Within its redesign of the SAT, the College Board sought to reflect the most important skills, prioritizing content that correlated with college readiness and success. Evidence-based reading and writing highlighting source text from science, history, and literature will replace the current sections on reading and writing. Every SAT is slated to contain a passage from either a founding document (e.g., Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address) or that is part of the “great global conversation.” The mathematics sections will focus on a more narrow range of key concepts to include problem solving and data analysis, algebraic concepts, and key content that serves to unlock advanced mathematical topics. The redesigned test will provide greater emphasis on the meaning of words in extended contexts and on how word choice shapes meaning, tone and impact versus its historical tendency to highlight mainly unfamiliar and esoteric vocabulary. The test will maintain its familiar structure of reading/writing and mathematics sections scored on a 1600 point scale plus an optional essay.

### About the Redesigned SAT



*\*Please note: Precise timing is tentative and subject to research.*

SAT

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### **Transparency**

The College Board seeks to provide a transparent set of expectations, publishing its content specifications, definitions and descriptions of key features, sample problems, and other details related to testing. Students will have access to a full set of sample questions beyond other materials they may research from outside sources. The prompt for the essay component (an optional component of the test), provided below, is published and will remain constant with only the source text varying across administrations.

**Essay Prompt:** *“As you read the passage in front of you, consider how the author uses evidence such as facts or examples, reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence, and stylistic and persuasive elements to add power to the ideas expressed. Write an essay in which you explain how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience.”*

Changes in the scoring also support transparency of expectations. Under its historical design, students were penalized ¼ point for each incorrect answer (versus questions left blank). The redesign eliminates what was perceived an obstacle by some and a hidden penalty by others.

## Equity

Finally, the College Board made a groundbreaking announcement about its collaboration with Khan Academy to provide free on-line test preparation for all students worldwide. This collaboration represents a sharing of information (vs a partnership or a business relationship) whereby College Board will provide Khan Academy access



to test specifications and materials and students will have the ability to download full version practice tests in addition to other supports and instructional tools. Khan Academy promises “sophisticated interactive software” enabling “deep practice” and supports to diagnose gaps (retrieved from <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/overview-sat-prep/a/khan-academy-partners-with-college-board-to-provide-free-sat-prep>). In addition to test preparation, the College Board is also providing application waivers to low-income households to support application to a broader range of colleges and universities.

## Transition

The redesigned SAT will see its initial administration in the spring of 2016 and primarily impact current high school sophomores enrolling in college in the fall of 2017. The College Board will release a redesigned PSAT designed to mirror the changes of the SAT, in the fall of 2015 to provide for aligned practice and preparation for students intending to take the new SAT. Likewise, the College Board has revamped its Readistep program for undergraduates which it will rebrand as the PSAT 8/9. Khan Academy programming is scheduled to launch in June of 2015. West Hartford students (current 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade) will have the opportunity to participate in a pilot of the new PSAT in January which serves as a preview of these new assessments for all interested students.

## Conclusion

The redesign of the SAT provides for a close alignment to high school curriculum and a nationally recognized college readiness measure. The College Board recognition of the critical skills most important for success in post-secondary education and career provide an external validation of our work to revamp and revitalize our curriculum. Success within a challenging high school program has long been recognized as the most important factor within the college admissions process and the redesign of the SAT lends greater leverage to school programming over test-prep.

Dr. Nancy DePalma, Mr. Paul Vicinus and Mr. Tor Fiske will be available to answer questions.