

SAT tests are A.) optional at colleges in New Jersey; B.) encouraged; C.) both

C: Longtime admissions ritual no longer required, but still viewed by some schools as valuable.

Katie Kausch For The Star-Ledger

The SAT college admissions test is now optional at every four-year New Jersey college. But that doesn't mean students shouldn't take the exam anyway.

Neither the SAT nor the ACT, another long-used college readiness exam, are required for regular admissions at any college in the Garden State, a review of each college's admission requirements found.

Despite not being required for admissions, SAT scores are still used in some way by most of the state's four-year colleges. Some colleges still require SAT scores for certain majors, including nursing, pharmacy or premedical programs. There are no test-optional applications for those majors.

Even for majors where the test is optional, several schools use SAT or ACT scores to place students in first-semester classes. Students who don't submit scores may have to take placement exams.

"We do still encourage students who have taken the test to share those scores with us because we have the opportunity to utilize those scores for course placement purposes," Robert Heinrich, the vice president for enrollment management at Stockton University, told NJ Advance Media.

Stockton, a public university of about 8,300 students in Atlantic County, stopped requiring SAT or ACT scores during its 2019 admissions cycle. By the next year, the majority of colleges had introduced



Some colleges still require SAT scores for certain majors or use them for placement of students in courses. Advance Local

some type of test-optional admissions policy as the pandemic derailed the SAT calendar and forced the cancellation of some of the busiest months for test takers.

Many education officials and opponents of the SAT cite the impact a student's finances have on their success. Wealthier students have more money to spend on test prep classes and materials, while low-income students can't always access those resources.

"That's one of the things that Stockton is really committed to, is opening up access to as many students as possible, and particularly those that are coming from underrepresented communities who may not have access to the resources that would have allowed them to prepare for those tests," Heinrich said of the school's shift away from the SATs.

A number of New Jersey schools went test optional pre-pandemic. Montclair State University and Rowan University both dropped the SAT requirement in 2014; Bloomfield College joined them in 2017.

Scott White, a private admissions consultant who spent decades working in higher education admissions offices, said few colleges went "test optional" because of strongly held beliefs about the fairness of requiring the test.

"The reality is that most schools became SAT optional, purely out of necessity during COVID," White said. "Just because so many kids couldn't take the test, it wasn't moral, it wasn't feasible to require the SATs."

Rates of students taking the SAT
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EXAM

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plummeted in the 2021-2022 school year, with just 45% of eligible students sitting for the exam.

More students took the exam the following year, with about 60% taking the SATs, but that's still down more than 10% from the 2018-2019 school year, state Department of Education data released this spring showed.

Many of the students who did take the SAT during the throes of the pandemic were higher-scoring students, bumping the average score for the 2020-21 school year to 1,117 out of a possible 1,600, about 50 points higher than both the year before and after.

Data for test participation and scores during the 2022-2023 school year will be available next spring.

While White said he believes colleges truly did not take SAT score submission into consideration during the height of the pandemic, the majority of students now should still be taking and submitting SAT scores.

"If a student has no good reason for not taking the test, and no good reason for not submitting scores, they will probably be at a disadvantage at a large number of highly selective schools," White said.

Some students will likely benefit from schools not requiring test scores, like those whose other academics and extracurriculars are exceptionally strong, or recruited athletes, White said.

He cautioned against making generalizations of all colleges, saying there are schools, including highly selective ones that are "SAT, optional, or SAT blind, and it's totally genuine."

"But I would be cautious about that if you're going to use that assumption at all schools," White said.

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