

Illinois is switching to THE SAT



By Tom Rose (Testive creator and founder)
www.testive.com

What is changing?

Every 11th grade student attending public high school in Illinois is required to take an exam in the spring so that the state can demonstrate overall progress toward meeting learning standards. In the past, students have taken the ACT, and more recently, the PARCC test. The Illinois State Board of Education has decided to drop both of these tests for 11th grade students and switch to using the SAT as the state accountability exam.

Who does this affect?

This change affects every 11th grade student at public high schools in Illinois, including public charter schools. These students will take the SAT for free, including the essay, beginning spring of 2017. Students are required to take this test as an assessment for “college and career readiness” in order to qualify for receiving a regular high school diploma, unless they are eligible for an alternative assessment or exempt from testing.

Why did Illinois switch to the SAT?

The change from the ACT and the PARCC tests to the SAT is complicated and somewhat controversial. The Illinois State Board of Education requires that schools administer an accountability test to students, and that students take a “college and career readiness” exam. Therefore, some sort of test is required for both schools and students. The driver of this particular change is competition between the SAT and the ACT, battling to gain market share in various states, both in the area of college readiness testing and also state accountability testing. There was a bidding war for the Illinois state high school accountability test, and College Board came out on top with the SAT, winning a three-year contract.

When is the mandatory SAT test date?

The SAT will be administered to all 11th grade students in Illinois on Wednesday, April 5, 2017 with a makeup test date of Tuesday, April 25, 2017. We expect future tests to be scheduled around the same period each April.

Where is my student’s test center?

Most students will take the test on April 5 in their local school. There may be some schools that establish off site testing locations; your school will notify you if there is anything special you need to do as part of this testing. Schools are highly incentivized to complete this testing, so they’ll be working hard to make sure that it happens.

Does my student have to sign up for the state SAT test?

Answer sheets and identification labels should be sent to your child’s school ahead of time, with no action independent action required – your child may be given a questionnaire or form to fill out in school, but they do not need to independently sign up via the College Board.

What if my child deserves special accommodations for a disability?

There is a special testing window designed for students who have been approved by the College Board for special accommodations. That window is April 5th to April 18th. Getting this approval is difficult, but not impossible. It typically requires a doctor’s note, paperwork, diligence, and patience. The approval process has a very long lead time, so if you require accommodations, I suggest beginning the approval process 6-months in advance, or as soon as possible.

What do educators think about the change to the SAT?

Many public education leaders are excited and optimistic about the change. The PARCC exam, which Illinois has administered for the past two years, is not a college entrance exam, so while it was useful to the state in tracking student learning, it was not necessarily useful to students on an individual level. The head of the Illinois Association of School Boards suggests that this move “eliminates [assessment] duplication,” providing more room for teaching and learning. One superinten-



dent says that “using a college admissions test like the SAT” for the state accountability exam is “logical” and students have “buy-in.” The state Superintendent of Education says that “district and school administrators overwhelmingly agree” that all high school students should have access to a college entrance exam.

Obviously, leaders at the state level are going to speak positively about this change, so we checked to see whether this reflects popular opinion among educators. While we can’t be sure, we did not find evidence that teachers or guidance counselors have voiced opposition to the change - generally, educators support fewer tests with greater efficiency. The major concern among educators is that they have sufficient training to familiarize themselves with the format of the SAT in order to help students prepare for the test. Schools have very limited resources for college entrance exam prep, so if your child is considering applying to a competitive college where SAT scores matter, you’ll need to take charge of the prep process yourself.

Should I take the SAT *and* the ACT?

This is a decision that you should make with your child based on his or her test taking abilities and desired

score. If your child does well on the mandatory SAT or is scoring high on full-length practice SATs and has achieved the scores needed for his or her top schools, taking both tests may not be necessary. On the other hand, if your child has trouble with the SAT and cannot seem to make the desired improvement, then it is worthwhile to consider the ACT as an alternative test. Here, the first step would be to look over the test specification for the ACT to become familiar with the layout, and then to take a full length practice test. If your student does better on the ACT, or it feels more intuitive and straightforward than the SAT, then he or she should opt for the ACT and begin prepping for that test.

What are the differences between the SAT and ACT?

The ACT is comprised of Math, Science, English, and Reading tests (sections) with an optional essay. Each section is scored on a 1-36 scale, and students receive a composite score that is the average of all four tests.

The SAT consists of three sections: Evidence-based Reading and Writing (EBRW), Math, and an optional essay. The EBRW and Math sections are each scored on a 200-800 scale, for a total combined score of 400-1600.