

Trends in College Standardized Testing 2021

"The pandemic caused [tectonic shifts in the college admission process](#)," declared Heath Einstein, dean of admission at Texas Christian University (TCU). One of the biggest upsets during this past year's (2020-2021) college applications cycle was the fact that [more than 1,450 colleges and universities](#) (temporarily) moved to a test-optional policy; the policy encompassed small, private institutions, all the Ivy League institutions and massive, land-grant, state schools alike.

So, what may have been true for you or even for your older child, may not be the case for your current high school junior's college admissions cycle. **While a lot has recently changed, the policy shifts ultimately are providing MORE FLEXIBILITY for your student:**

- **"Test-optional:"** List of schools not requiring the ACT and SAT grew during the pandemic and will stay at an elevated level into next admissions' cycle (2021-2022)
- **Score Choice:** Students can decide which test results to send (instead of sending EVERY test result)
- **Super Scoring:** Many more schools (but NOT all) now super score the ACT
- **Self-Reported Scores:** Many schools are accepting self-reported SAT and ACT scores for the application, equating to major savings! Scores are verified with Official Score Reports upon admission
- **SAT/ ACT Essay:** Majority of schools have dropped the essay requirement from testing
 - **And the College Board** recently eliminated the option from the SAT
- **SAT Subject tests:** because fewer elite schools required each year, the College Board eliminated

The Test-Optional movement is here to stay, for now

The growth in test-optional policies was steady prior to the pandemic. In 2019 there were about 1,000 test-optional schools, and one year later, in March 2020, 1,070 schools. But, the global pandemic resulted in an abrupt and significant spike in test-optional policy adoption.

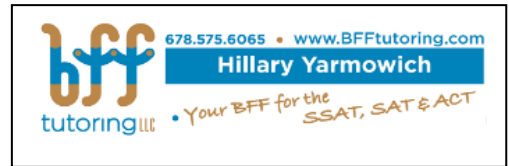
Janet Godwin, ACT's CEO, published [a blog post](#) in late February, 2021 that admitted that test-optional admissions policies are likely here to stay. "It is somewhat unlikely that institutions who adopted temporary or pilot test use policies in response to COVID will all return to test-required in the near term," she wrote. Robert Schaeffer, director of the National Center for [Fair and Open Testing](#), indicated that at least 1,360 four-year institutions "have announced that they will not require fall 2022 applicants to submit standardized exam results."

Test Optional does not mean Test-Blind

2021 was a rough time to apply to large universities: Harvard saw a +42% increase; UCLA +33 %; NYU +20%; Colgate +102%. [While 2021 saw an increase of 10-40% in applications](#) for large universities, the students were competing for less spots, due to the record-breaking number of 2020 admitted students opting on gap year, another fallout from the Coronavirus.

So, while test scores are no longer required to complete an application, **the vast majority of test-optional schools still accept and value strong scores in the admissions process.** In some respects, the additional data that test scores provide may be EVEN MORE valuable to colleges when they review applications for current juniors. Social distancing due to COVID-19 has meant an end to summer internships, service programs, and other extracurricular activities for many students. Additionally, many courses moved to a pass/fail grading structure in the midst of at-home schooling, which means students

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have less of a chance to show their academic skill at the apex of their high-school career. In Honors Physics, a “Pass” simply doesn’t carry the same clout as an “A.”

In this environment, solid test scores may carry even more weight than usual. Additionally, test scores still play a pivotal role in scholarships and merit-aid award.

(On a related note, It is unknown at this time how this increase in applications will affect yield, the percent of students who accept the invitation to go to that university. With applications way up, the formulas used by many colleges will not be something they can rely on and many colleges plan to make more use of waiting lists.)

Schools accept either the SAT or the ACT

This is not necessarily a new trend, but many parents are surprised to learn that yes, all colleges (including Ivy League universities) equally accept either test. The most important consideration, when deciding between the two tests, is to choose the test on which your student will better perform.

Additionally, there are NO colleges out there that REQUIRE a student to take both tests. If your student wants to provide data from both exams, schools will accept and consider. However, students should focus their energies on one test and do well on it. Afterwards, their time will be better invested in enhanced grades and more involvement in extra-curriculars.

Score Choice:

Up until about 5 years ago, students had to submit ALL standardized test scores. However, most colleges now provide students the opportunity to select which test administration scores they want to submit.

“Super scoring”:

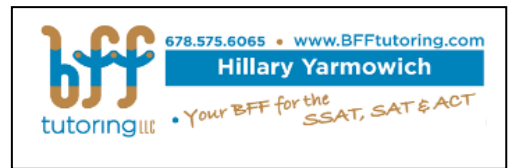
As recently as 5 years ago, colleges did not “super score” the ACT. *Super Scoring is the practice of using the highest section scores from different test dates – perhaps a math score from a March test and a English score from a June test and the reading score from a July test.*

However, more colleges are considering the best scores from each section of the ACT or the SAT to create the highest possible composite score. (NOTE: at this point, neither the SAT nor the ACT super scores the tests; the colleges do. When a test result is sent, all section scores from that sitting are included.) [The ACT encourages super scoring](#) notating that with super scoring, students are almost always better off re-sitting for a test, with more likelihood of improving a score in a focused area.

The ACT had announced it will be “Super Scoring”— [This has been on hold but as of April 2, NOW available!](#) (This had been scheduled to roll out in October 2020 and then indefinitely delayed.)

The ACT automatically creates a Superscore report, on the student’s portal for submission to colleges. The change would provide colleges a single report, compiled by the ACT which would highlight just the highest score from each section of various administrations (instead of separate score reports that would be super scored by the individual schools). The schools will also receive each individual report, in the even that the don’t accept the superscore.

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The ACT is warning that colleges set their own policies regarding **superscoring** and some may not accept the super score compilation. Additionally, note that many merit scholarship programs, including GA's HOPE Scholarship, do NOT accept a superscore compilation.

The ACT had announced a Section "Re-take" option—As of March 2021: ON HOLD

The ACT super score option was planned as part a bigger initiative where students would also have the option to re-take single sections of the ACT after a full-length exam was completed. Single section tests would only be administered online, at testing centers that offered online testing. Both initiatives have been on hold, indefinitely, as the ACT has had to prioritize access to full (first time) ACT testing, problematic given the widespread, last-minute cancelations due to Covid pandemic.

The Essay for the ACT and SAT is no longer required for the majority of colleges

In the summer of 2018, a flurry of elite schools dropped the SAT and ACT essay requirement, leaving the number of schools who require to about 20 (out of close to 5000 colleges). The University of California system, at the time, was the notable exception.

In January 2021, the College Board announced that they will be [eliminating the SAT essay option](#). However, the ACT still provides the writing option. Students in the class of 2022 or later should be aware that language about "required" or "recommended" Subject Tests and the SAT/ACT Essay on college websites is likely outdated! So double check this information.

Self-Reporting Scores will save you some bucks... so pay attention to this option:

On many applications, schools will ask you to **self-report** your SAT or ACT scores.

NOTE: Official score reports WILL be required **AFTER the student is admitted and chooses to enroll** (so ensure that your student self-reports honestly!).

Contrast this to a situation just a few years ago-- if you were applying to 8 schools and wanted to submit 2 different ACT reports (to super score), you would have had to submit during the application process. Your 16 reports would have a price tag of about \$240. Under the new process, you would pay for the reports only for your one school (about \$30!).

SAT Subject Tests—gone!

Many elite colleges had been **toning down their SAT Subject Test requirement prior to 2021. Then in January, 2021, [the College Board eliminated Subject Tests!](#)** This was welcomed news but really only to those students who were applying to the very selective group of schools who required this additional hurdle. With this change, there will be a bigger emphasis on the subject-specific AP exams in the college admissions evaluation process.

****Bottomline, students should carefully read each school's requirements to both help drive their standardized test prep timeline and maximize their opportunities. Many schools update their requirements at the beginning of admission's cycle, starting in August****

Have additional questions?

Contact BFF Tutoring and let us assist you.

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