

Trends in College Standardized Testing 2024

Students about to embark on the ever-challenging college application process would do well to know the latest trends and use this knowledge to their benefit.

The volume of college applications has continued its upward spiral. More students are applying to college than ever before, and they are applying to a greater number of schools. The Common Application reports the overall volume of college applications increased by 30% over the past three years. NYU, for example, received 120,000 applications in 2022 an increase of 41% since 2020. The [University of Georgia](#) had more than 43,700 applications in 2023, a 10% increase versus last cycle but a whopping 49% increase since 2020. As a result, the acceptance rate has fallen to record lows at many of the most sought-after universities.

As of Jan. 1, 2024 college application volume rose 9% in the 2023-24 academic year compared with a year earlier, according to the latest report by the [Common Application](#).

Competitive schools are opting back in: While SAT and ACT scores have historically been key to the college admissions process, many schools had adopted test-optional or test-blind admissions policies. Initially a temporary policy, due to the pandemic temporarily shutting down testing sites, the test-optional trend may finally be on its way out.

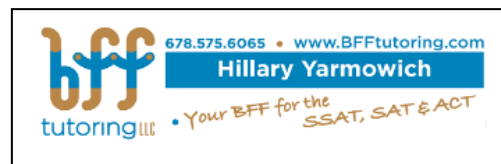
A [handful of schools](#) have resurrected the testing requirement: [MIT](#), Dartmouth, Georgetown, Yale, the [University of Texas at Austin](#), and Brown University [joined the list](#). In April both [Harvard and Cal Tech](#) opted back in as well. In late April, Cornell reinstated testing requirements, given the [compelling research outcomes](#) presented by the Task Force on Standardized Testing in Admissions.

Additional competitive schools are likely to join the group, along with schools that aren't as selective. [The University of Tennessee](#), which accepts 68% of applicants, decided a year and a half ago to [bring the tests back](#). (Schools that still don't require: [click here](#))

While this feels like a big change, the savviest of students had been submitting scores during this hiatus, and the admission rates for those submitting impressive scores were demonstrably higher. School policies for the next academic year are generally posted by August 1, so stay tuned.

With all this, what may have been true for you or even for your older child, may not be the case for your rising or current high school junior's college admissions cycle. Below is a summary of many of the trends over the last few years. ***Please read details on the following pages:***

- **"Test-optional:"** List of schools not requiring the ACT and SAT grew during the pandemic. However, this list may change. Check your targeted schools' website after August 1. See here for the [top schools that required](#) scores. (updated 5/2024)
- **SAT Digital Format:** The paper/ pencil SAT is a thing of the past. Students will sit for the new SAT format on their computer (at a test center), starting in March 2024. This is relevant for the Class of 2025 and younger.
- **Score Choice:** For the majority of school, students can choose which test results to send (instead of sending every test score they sat for).
- **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:** NO MORE! Fewer elite schools were requiring, so the College Board eliminated!
- **The end of Affirmative Action program:** [read here to learn more.](#)

The Test-Optional movement

The growth in test-optional policies was steady prior to the pandemic. But, the global pandemic resulted in an abrupt and significant spike in test-optional policy adoption.

Georgia and Florida schools quickly reinstated their test policy in late 2020

In Georgia, for the Fall 2025 application season (Fall 2026 admission), the [Georgia University system announced in May 2024](#) that they will require test scores at 7 of its most competitive schools, including GA Tech, UGA and GA College. The remaining 19 GA schools will remain test-optional.

Will schools be reversing their policies now that the pandemic is winding down?

Students will need to navigate their college admissions checklist to ensure that all requirements are met because the policies are inconsistent across the schools and are in annual flux.

NOTE: A review of the 2023 admissions data revealed that the majority of acceptances at highly competitive colleges went to students who had submitted test scores, indicating that “test optional” has been somewhat in name only. Yale 88%, Duke 86%, UT Austin 85%, Chicago 84%, Princeton 84%, Brown 81%, Northwestern 78%, Michigan 78%, RPI 77% Wesleyan 76%

Test Optional does not mean Test-Blind

As mentioned, many colleges and universities [reported record-breaking applicant numbers with record-low acceptance rates](#) in 2022. Harvard saw a +42% increase; UCLA +33 %; NYU +20%; Colgate +102%.

The test-optional policy resulted in a MORE competitive playing field with many more applicants, and it is unlikely that the 2023 stats, when released, will be much different.

This increase in college applications is also affecting state schools as well as schools once consider “less competitive.” For example, the demand for an Auburn degree has never been greater, with the university recently topping 48,000 freshmen applications for fall 2023—an all-time high. The acceptance rate for Auburn’s early action periods was 44%. Those students had an average ACT score of 28.2 and an average GPA of 4.2, with less than 9% admitted under the university’s test-optional pathway.

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 MORE valuable to colleges when they review applications, especially at the more competitive schools.

Recently released data demonstrates that while the number of applicants who chose to submit scores dropped significantly (around the 40% mark), **the percent of students who did submit scores were accepted at a much higher rate.** (however, not all schools have released data on this subject) [See here](#)

Lastly, test scores still play a pivotal role in scholarships and merit-aid award. And savvy students are still taking the exams to bolster their applications. [Read more](#)

The SAT launched a new test format: A shorter test which is only available online.

The last paper/ pencil SAT was administered in December 2023 and the digital SAT rolled out to American test-takers in March 2024. This is a completely revamped test in a digital format. Students sit for the test, using the “Bluebook” app, that is loaded onto their computer. This change affects students in the Class of 2025 and younger. It is comprised of two sections: Reading/Writing and Math. Students have 64 minutes to complete the Reading/Writing section and 70 minutes to complete the Math section for a total of 2 hours and 14 minutes, about an hour less time than the previous paper/ pencil version. (and

The ACT is not changing for the Class of 2026: While the SAT is a shorter test, it is not necessarily easier. Students should carefully consider the ACT, a time-tested, reliable test.

The ACT announced changes to the ACT, launching in Sept 2025—this will affect the Class of 2027 and younger. [See here, for more information.](#)

While the ACT has been testing a digital platform in some states and internationally, there have been no official plans for a national shift to a digital ACT. The digital format of the ACT that has been tested is the same test as the paper and pencil test.

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 and value either test. Students should choose the test format that they believe they will score better on. (BFF Tutoring provides initial diagnostic testing to help you navigate this important decision).

Note, there are no colleges 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. Their time is better invested in enhanced grades and more involvement in extracurriculars.

Score Choice:

Up until about 7 years ago, students had to submit ALL standardized test scores. Now, the majority of colleges support ‘score choice,’ providing students the opportunity to select which test administration scores they want to submit. (Some highly competitive schools still require that students submit all scores. Georgetown and Yale are two examples, but policies are frequently updated. Please carefully read school policies.)

“Super scoring:”

As recently as 5-7 years ago, colleges did not “super score” the ACT. (Super scoring for the SAT has been the norm for a while). *Super Scoring is the practice of using the highest section score from different test dates – perhaps a math score from a March test and an 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. While this is advantageous for the student, this practice also benefits the school's profile of accepted students.

[The ACT now encourages super scoring](#), noting 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 now provides students their "Super Score"

Launched in June 2021, the ACT automatically creates a "Super Score" report on a student's portal, ready for students to submit to colleges. The change provides colleges with a single report, compiled by the ACT, which highlights the highest score from each section of various administrations. The schools also receive each individual report as back up, in the event they don't accept the "super score."

****The ACT cautions that colleges set their own policies regarding "super scoring." Some schools may not accept the super score compilation. *** ***[Please take the time to understand your targeted schools' CURRENT policy. As of June 2024, some schools like Princeton, UVA, Uni of Texas and Georgetown will not superscore the ACT. These policies can change. Additionally, many merit scholarship programs, including GA's HOPE Scholarship, do NOT accept a "super score" compilation.](#)***

The ACT's Section "Re-take" option—STILL ON HOLD

This ACT option to re-take single sections of the ACT after a full-length exam was completed is not available, despite the hype you may have read about a couple of years ago

The Writing section 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. As of 2023, there are [seven \(7\) schools](#) that still require. Read more, [here](#). Alternatively, some schools may require the submission of a graded writing assignment.

While the [SAT dropped the essay](#) altogether from its format (as of January, 2021), the ACT still provides the writing as an 'add on' option. For the majority of students, it is NOT necessary to sign up for the ACT writing section.

BFF Tutoring recommends that students consider sitting for the ACT writing section ONLY if they are strong writers, if they are considering a major related to writing, or / and if they are applying to one of the seven schools that require. Note: If a student opts to sit for the ACT Writing, the score will be on their ACT report. A student cannot opt to withhold the score.

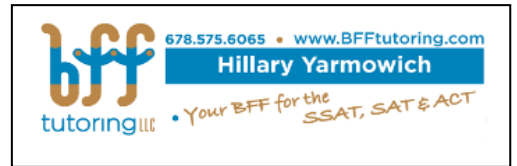
Self-Reporting Scores will save you some bucks... so pay attention to this option:

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 \$500. Under the new process, you would pay for the reports only for your one school (about \$35!).

Updated: July, 2024



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 welcome news but really only to those students who were applying to the very selective group of schools who had 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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