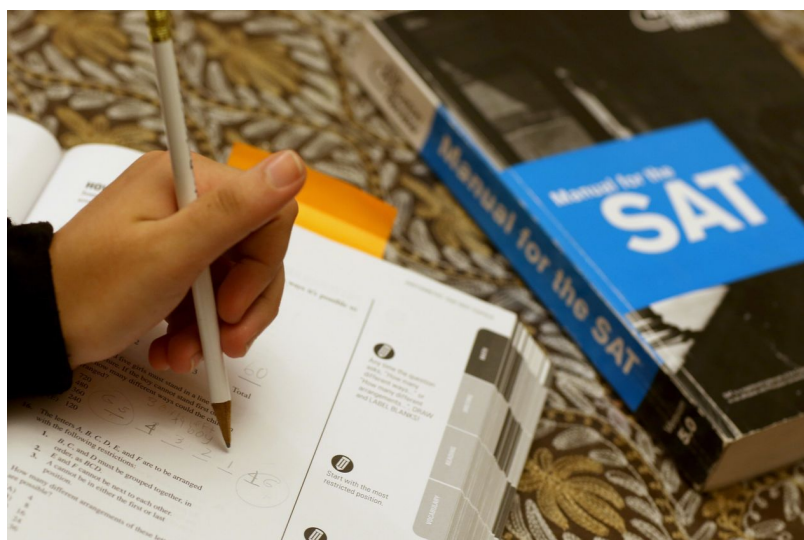


U.S.

College Board Drops Plans for SAT Student Adversity Scores

Facing criticism, nonprofit that oversees test backs off proposal to capture students' socioeconomic backgrounds in single metric



The College Board said it will now try to capture a student's social and economic background in a broad array of data points.

PHOTO: JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

By Douglas Belkin

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The College Board is abandoning its plan to assign an adversity score to every student who takes the SAT college admissions test, after facing criticism from educators and parents.

Instead, it will try to capture a student's social and economic background in a broad array of data points. The new tactic is called Landscape and, while it includes much of the same information, it doesn't combine the metrics into a single score.

The original tool, called the "environmental context dashboard," combined about 15 socioeconomic metrics from a student's high school and neighborhood to create something college admission officers called an "adversity score."

Considering a student’s race and class in college admissions decisions is a contentious issue. Many colleges, including Harvard University, say ensuring a diverse student body is part of a school’s educational mission. A lawsuit accusing Harvard of discriminating against Asian-American applicants by holding them to a higher standard is awaiting a final ruling from a judge. Lawsuits charging unfair admission practices have also been filed against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of California system.

How the College Board Graded Adversity at Schools

The College Board considered factors such as family income and AP test scores and graded each high school from 1 to 100, with 1 indicating the least and 100 the toughest challenges. It has since dropped its plan for a single adversity score, but this data is still part of its assessment. Look up schools, according to the College Board’s 2018-19 test.

SCHOOL ^	LOCATION
21ST CENTURY CYBER CHARTER SCH	EXTON, PA.
A AND M CONSOLIDATED HS	COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS
A C FLORA HIGH SCHOOL	COLUMBIA, S.C.
A C REYNOLDS HIGH SCHOOL	ASHEVILLE, N.C.
A G WEST BLACK HILLS HIGH SCH	OLYMPIA, WASH.
A MACEO SMITH NEW TECH HS	DALLAS, TEXAS
A N MCCALLUM HIGH SCHOOL	AUSTIN, TEXAS

“We listened to thoughtful criticism and made Landscape better and more transparent,” David Coleman, CEO of the College Board, said in a statement.

“Landscape provides admissions officers more consistent background information so they can fairly consider every student, no matter where they live and learn,” he said.

The backlash emerged after an article in The Wall Street Journal in May detailed the College Board’s plans for the adversity score.

The College Board, the New York-based nonprofit that oversees the SAT, said it has worried for years about race and income inequality influencing test results.

Readers Weigh In

How—if at all—should the College Board reflect a student’s social and economic background? Join the conversation below.

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“The SAT shouldn’t delve into socioeconomics in any way shape or form. Not even a modified re-do as today’s piece suggests. Instead, the SAT needs to focus solely on aptitude. Then, aside from SAT, social justice engineering metrics can be measured and accounted for, but in an entirely separate venue.” — Thomas Andrews

White students scored an average of 177 points higher than black students and 133 points higher than Hispanic students in 2018 results. Asian students scored 100 points higher than white students. The children of wealthy and college-educated parents outperformed their classmates.

An analysis by Georgetown University researchers earlier this year found that if the most selective U.S. colleges and universities relied solely on SAT scores for admissions decisions, their campuses would be wealthier, whiter and more male, raising questions about the role of standardized testing in admissions.

Landscape is designed to help colleges compare an applicant’s test scores to those of other students in their high school and beyond, the

College Board said. It also aims to give a picture of the quality of the school and relative wealth and stability of the neighborhood.

Six “challenge factors” provide the “summary neighborhood challenge indicator” and the “summary high-school challenge indicator,” according to the College Board. Those factors are college attendance, household structure, median family income, housing stability, education levels and crime. Admissions officers who tested Landscape estimate they lack high-school information for about 25% of all applications, the College Board said.

Fifty colleges used the adversity score last year as part of a beta test. The College Board had planned to expand it to 150 institutions this fall, and then use it broadly the following year.

Colleges have long considered students’ high schools and neighborhoods when making admissions decisions, but with more applications coming from more places, incorporating consistent information about every high school and neighborhood becomes difficult, according

to admissions officers. Colleges will receive more than 10 million applications from students attending more than 30,000 high schools.

This is the second time the College Board has rolled back efforts to reflect students' social and economic backgrounds. It dropped a similar effort 20 years ago amid pushback from colleges.

The SAT—which includes math and verbal sections and is still taken with No. 2 pencils—is facing additional problems. Federal prosecutors revealed this spring that students cheated on both the SAT and ACT for years as part of a far-reaching college admissions cheating scheme.

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