

COLLEGE PLANNING

IMPACT OF TEST- OPTIONAL POLICIES ON COLLEGE ADMISSIONS



By Jim Paterson

The upheaval that COVID-19 caused to standardized testing protocols and enrollment generally prompted a big jump in the number of colleges who are giving students options about presenting test scores, but uncertainty still remains about testing policies and how they will take shape in the future. For students, there also is a big question about their own choice: Given the option for submitting scores, what should they choose to do?

There are no clear answers to those questions, but experts say when the school year gets underway and things somewhat return to normal, it will become clearer how the issues surrounding the SAT and ACT testing will pan out, particularly the circumstances when a student should take them.



Bob Schaeffer, executive director of **FairTest** (<https://www.fairtest.org>), which advocates for a move away from standardized testing, believes the trend away from standardized tests will continue.

"The bottom line is that we have found more than 70 percent of all U.S. four-year schools will not require most or all

applicants to submit ACT or SAT scores for admission in fall 2022," he says. "In many cases, these policies extend for several additional years or indefinitely. More than half of all bachelor-degree granting institutions will be test-optional or test-blind in five years. Test-optional policies are the new normal for undergraduate admissions."



Gina Gerrato Greenhaus, a San Diego-based educational consultant who has worked closely with students over the last two years when so much has been up in the air about testing, says, however, that no one seems certain about the policies colleges will follow in the future. She recommends that students pay close attention to the trends and the specific approaches of the colleges that interest them.

She says that there are a number of

factors students should take into consideration when they weigh whether to take a test – or even whether they choose a particular school based on their test policy. Financial aid or sports scholarships, for instance, may be based on test scores and certain departments within a college may consider them despite the college being test optional. A student who does well on such tests obviously may want to present scores, especially if other items in their profile are less strong.

One of her students who wanted to study engineering only had good grades but was "a very good test-taker with close to a perfect score" and she recommended he submit scores. However, for another senior who was a strong student and was going to an out-of-state school where she was obviously qualified, Gerrato Greenhaus didn't advocate for submitting test scores. "Her grades and extracurricular profile spoke for itself and she was accepted to several colleges with scholarships," she says. "If the test score is going to add to a student's profile then it makes sense to submit one, she says. "In other cases, it's a neutral or negative factor."

Some students worry that colleges say they are blind to test scores but still may use them, potentially just to initially screen students, she notes.