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Aug. 26, 2008

Number of Texas students taking SAT climbs; results show key to higher scores is preparation

AUSTIN – The road to college is broadening in Texas as significantly more minority students took the SAT in 2008. Forty-two percent of the Texas test-takers said they would be the first in their families to attend college.

Overall, 137,024 students or 50 percent of the 2008 graduates of Texas public and private schools took the SAT. That is a 3.8 percent increase over last year and a 7.3 percent increase over the last five years.

The College Board, which administers the SAT, reported significant increases for underrepresented students: 12.9 percent more Hispanics and 10 percent more African-American students took the SAT in 2008. In Texas 49 percent of the test takers were minority students, compared to 35 percent nationally.

While the state’s testing population increased, scores declined. Texas students in public and private schools earned an average score of 488 on the critical reading exam, a four-point decrease. The average math score was 505 and the average writing score was 480, which represents a two-point drop from last year on both tests. The Texas scores lagged behind the scores nationally.

Among the approximately 1.5 million students tested in the United States, scores were unchanged. The average scores for U.S. students in 2008 were 502 for critical reading, 515 for mathematics, and 494 for writing.

Among other large states with diverse populations, New York saw scores on all three tests decline. Florida’s scores rose on two tests and declined on one. California’s scores fell on one test and were flat on two exams.

The College Board found that Texas students who followed a rigorous high school schedule that included four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies and three years of science earned scores that were 36 to 40 points higher on each section of the SAT than did those who took a lighter class load.

	Rigorous schedule	Less rigorous schedule	Difference
Critical Reading	498	458	40
Mathematics	514	475	39
Writing	489	453	36

“Today’s data proves that Texas students are headed in the right direction. Students taking the Recommended High School Program are more prepared for postsecondary success,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott.

The differences were even more pronounced between the students who took the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) versus those who didn’t.

Students who had taken this preparation test scored 95 points higher on reading, 100 points higher on mathematics and 96 points higher on writing than did their classmates who did not take the PSAT.

	Took PSAT	Didn't take PSAT	Difference
Critical Reading	530	435	95
Mathematics	547	447	100
Writing	522	426	96

Texas saw a 6.3 percent increase in the number of juniors taking the PSAT and an 8.6 percent increase in the number of sophomores taking the exam in 2008. Texas school districts can use their high school allotment funds to pay the SAT and PSAT registration fee for students.

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