

Colleges make the switch to test optional

Many schools begin to do away with ACT and SAT tests and begin to take a new approach for college admissions

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Students walk into an empty gym, some filled with fear for the test ahead of them, while others are confident and prepared to perform well. The test is placed in front of them. Some students start getting sweaty palms and worry about their college future, as others are not affected and feel self-assured in their abilities.

“The SAT and ACT are standardized entrance exams used to measure what a student has learned in high school. Often, colleges and universities use the reported earned scores as a measure of college readiness,” said Brooke Huser, who is the associate director of admissions recruitment for Ball State. “The SAT measures math and evidenced based reading and writing [EBRW] performance. The ACT measures English, mathematics, reading, and science skills.”

College entrance exams are tests required by certain colleges to help evaluate where that student is in their education, and if they are ready for college or not.

“They are broken into sections of reading, writing and

math. Each section is scored individually on how you do and then it is combined for a sum total of what we call a composite score, which is what most colleges look at. It’s based on multiple choice questions and the amount you get correct. No matter how many you got wrong or didn’t answer, it only counts the number you get

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correct,” said test coordinator Brittany Eisner.

Colleges want these scores to help make the best decisions on who is best fit and will excel at their school.

“They are standardized tests that try to measure what students know and then try to project what their future success and academics might be,” said school counselor Mark Clark.

Some schools are test optional, which means students can take the test, or they can say no to the test, said Clark.

If students would prefer to keep their scores private, and have colleges only look at their GPA or course riger, they can. DePauw, Transylvania, and Ohio Wesleyan University are a few schools that have made this switch.

This gives students much more flexibility when applying for college. Instead of being bound to two tests, students can now be evaluated on their overall performance in their high school career, rather than just their testing ability.

“A student’s high school GPA and curriculum are the best predictors of long-term student success. So, while test scores can be beneficial for some students, they alone are not the best predictor of student success. We believed that a test optional policy would provide more students access to our university,” Huser.

Not all students test the same way. Some perform well, while others break under the pressure due to anxieties. Big tests are not always the best way to measure success. After coming to this realization, Ball State began to explore new options for their admissions office.

“Our office started exploring the option of being test-optional several years ago but it became our official policy in August

2018. We’re happy to be the first state school in Indiana to be test-optional,” said Huser.

Not all universities have made this switch because it is still a relevantly new idea. Since this idea is still new, students are encouraged to continue to take the SAT and ACT.

“I would say it is still probably a good idea to take the ACT or SAT whichever one you feel more comfortable with or aligns with the dates you can take it. Solely because not every school is on that yet and so you don’t really want to limit yourself to your options assuming you only apply to test option schools because we are just really trying it out right now. And no one knows how it is going to turn out,” said Eisner.

Most students tend to go into college right after high school but that is not the case for all.

Some of these students take a gap year or get a job but then decide to attend college later. Gaining more experience and knowledge from the real world makes some students feel more equipt for college.

“In this current time we have so many kinds of students applying for college whether it is a student who took a few years off after highschool, that ACT score since they have been out of school for so long is probably not going to be a true measure of what that person knows,” said Eisner.

While some schools remain still wanting these test scores, more and more schools are making the switch to test optional, and the reasons for this continue to vary. From looking at their school courses to just wanting to offer students more flexibility. These schools just want to help their students succeed the best way that they can.



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