

# The Case Against Standardized Testing



By Nikkee Porcaro

Results from a 2016 survey conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling showed 82.2 percent of colleges attributed either “considerable importance” or “moderate importance” to ACT or SAT test scores in admission decisions on first-time freshmen. Last month, we featured an article on the case for the importance of standardized testing in college admissions, but a case can also be made for not taking, or reporting scores for, these seemingly all-important tests.

In fact, not every school requires standardized tests. Additionally, when considering students for admission into art or theatre programs, for example, colleges are generally much more concerned with portfolios or auditions than standardized tests. Finally, standardized tests are really only one piece of the puzzle, one way to measure a kind of intelligence.

Here are some valid reasons a student might go test-optional:

**Many colleges don't require testing as part of the application submission anymore.** According to FairTest.org, more than 1000 colleges and universities “are ‘test optional,’ ‘test flexible,’ or otherwise de-emphasize the use of standardized tests by *making admissions decisions — without using ACT or SAT scores — for all or many applicants who recently graduated from U.S. high schools.*” Students should keep in mind that if they choose this route, the other pieces of the application, such as rigor of courses, grades, leadership, extracurriculars, recommendations, and/or admissions essays will be what they are judged on, and they will need to shine.

**For some students, the stress of testing outweighs the benefits.** If the mere idea of sitting down with a prep book is completely overwhelming, or the pressure of achieving a certain score due to peer, parental, cultural, or societal pressure is negatively affecting a student's quality of life, it is important for them to realize that there are plenty of paths that do not involve standardized testing, including a gap year, community or junior

colleges, or colleges (like the ones above) that are test-flexible.

**Testing doesn't measure less-traditional kinds of intelligence.** Psychologist Howard Gardner famously developed the concept of multiple intelligences in 1983, asserting that many people have non-traditional ways of displaying their intelligence in categories such as visual-spatial, logical reasoning, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and linguistic.

While standardized tests may seem to (and often, but not always, do) favor those with high marks in the logical reasoning and linguistic categories, even these learners sometimes possess skills tests can't measure. A high-schooler who can captivate a room with charismatic public speaking, visualize and subsequently draw a perfect likeness of the Jefferson Memorial, or hear a song once on the radio and play it on the piano, possesses such skills. Intelligence comes in many forms, and a student who is not big on standardized testing, but is outstanding in a non-traditional way, may benefit tremendously from

presenting themselves with demonstrable skills rather than a test score.

Here in the DMV, I see many students fall prey to the “Sweatshirt Game,” wherein they're so concerned with getting into a school that they can tell people about (or proudly wear a name-emblazoned sweatshirt advertising the school) that they fail to consider other options that might better fit them. It's hard for many students at this age (and parents too) to consider non-traditional paths to higher education. I'm not saying a student should immediately scrap testing (it also doesn't hurt to take them and just not report them to test-optional schools), but with more and more options available for higher education, students and parents should be informed about the multitude of choices they have in the college admissions process.

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