



National Association for
College Admission Counseling

NACAC encourages public institutions and systems to make submitting standardized admission test scores optional for the 2021–22 admission cycle.

The coming college application cycle will be reshaped by unprecedented disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fundamental infrastructure upon which the college application process relies has largely been rendered inoperable due to health and safety concerns. Secondary schools play an integral role in facilitating college recruitment, offering students assistance with college advising, FAFSA completion, college application assistance, hosting college admission representatives, and assisting students with registration for the college admission exams. Importantly, colleges rely on secondary schools to administer the ACT and SAT. All of these services to students have been disrupted by the pandemic.

Education Week, which has [tracked K-12 school closures](#) nationwide, notes that the “COVID-19 pandemic is poised to make the 2020–21 school year as challenging—if not more so—than the last.” Globally, according to [UNESCO](#), at the peak of the pandemic in mid-April 2020, 194 countries had implemented nationwide school closures, affecting close to 1.6 billion students—90.1 percent of the world’s total enrolled learners.

As a result, ACT and SAT [testing centers are severely limited](#) or unavailable for test administration. In addition, school closures have resulted in limited or no availability of assistance from school counselors and other educators to help students prepare or register for the SAT and ACT. Over a week prior to the August administration, [46 percent](#) of testing centers have closed, according to the College Board, and, of those still open, many are operating at reduced capacity.

Finally, if institutions were to continue to require the tests for admission, the pandemic and its accompanying risks will place an extraordinary financial and public health burden on high schools to administer tests. As a result, high school students unable to take SAT or ACT this year [number in the millions](#).

Yet even in the face of these extraordinary circumstances, more than 100 public universities, including several state systems, continue to require students to submit either an SAT or ACT score for the current admission cycle. In some cases, these institutions enroll tens of thousands of students, creating an outsized burden for all families whose students seek admission to them.

Last week, a [NACAC task force](#) raised pointed concerns about SAT and ACT requirements, such as the cost to students, families, and high schools; inequity in access and outcomes; and over-reliance on secondary schools as the means of administration, all of which are intensified in the midst of COVID-19.

At present, nearly 1,600 colleges and universities nationwide—55 percent of all four-year colleges—have waived standardized testing requirements for 2020–21. We must consider how public institutions that continue to maintain test requirements stand in relation to students and families, as they appear to send the signal that college admission exams [take priority](#) over students’ health, even when the majority of colleges have recognized that the exams are not essential for admission this year. Indeed, high schools have begun to prohibit institutions still requiring tests from engaging with their students through school channels, a vital communications element in any college’s recruitment process.

Should public institutions maintain their test requirements, US Department of Education [data](#) suggest that they stand to lose tens of thousands of students (and correlated tuition)—both from within and outside the state—to institutions not requiring the tests. They also risk creating a [disparate impact](#) due to prohibitive costs of sitting for an exam, particularly among low-income and many minority communities, which could expose state institutions, systems, and administration to civil rights actions.

The existence of public universities is predicated on their ability to serve *all* the citizens in their respective states, not just those with means or privilege. We cannot muzzle the dire reality our students, schools, and colleges face. Inequities caused by COVID-19 disruption—loss of family income, secondary school closures, interruptions in the K-12 educational program—will worsen an already difficult situation for millions of students.

In this critical time, public colleges must be mindful of their founding purpose of serving students and families and recognize that lifting testing requirements in 2020–21 will be in the students’ best interest. Taking this action will strengthen the future of our nation’s public colleges. ■