

# Losing The Race: The SAT and College Admissions

by

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Efforts to eliminate standardized tests have mounted over the past decade, particularly when tests are used in decisions related to promotion, graduation, and college admission. The attack on standardized testing has primarily focused on the SAT, a test of mathematical and reading proficiency that was developed in 1926 to determine college readiness.<sup>1</sup> The SAT is now taken by 1.26 million students throughout the nation. More than 80 percent of four-year colleges consider the SAT in admission decisions.

A large, diverse group of individuals and organizations oppose the SAT—condemning it as unreliable, invalid, and socially harmful. Critics can be found in professional educational and psychological

associations, institutions of higher education, groups representing minorities, business coalitions, state legislatures, and newspaper editorial boards.

*The rush to expel standardized tests ignores research on curriculum and student performance that offers solutions for under-performance of minority students and educational inequities.*

Race and ethnicity lie at the center of the test debate. The persistent performance gap between Hispanic, black, and white students stimulates questions about the nature of testing and intelligence. The rush to expel standardized tests ignores research on curriculum and student performance that offers solutions for under-performance of minority students and educational inequities.

Efforts to eliminate the SAT are paying off although success is not readily apparent. Most colleges and universities have limited the impact of SAT scores on admission decisions, and several states have enacted legislation restricting its role in admission policies for public institutions of higher education.

The SAT has served as the academic gatekeeper for higher education; its demise is significantly changing qualifications for college admission, curricula, and graduation rates. Weakening of higher education's academic

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<sup>1</sup> In 1990, the Scholastic Aptitude Test was changed to the Scholastic Assessment Test and in 1996, the name was shortened to just the SAT by the College Board ("Emphasis on SAT compromises educational system" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Richard Atkinson, [www.jsonline.com/news/editorials/apr01/atkinson29042701.asp](http://www.jsonline.com/news/editorials/apr01/atkinson29042701.asp)).

gatekeeper is significantly changing public education as well, allowing elementary and secondary schools to institutionalize the social and vocational programs that displace academic studies. These changes have broad and fundamental social implications that merit close examination and public debate on standardized tests, particularly the SAT.

## THE TEXAS BYPASS

During the past five years, the Texas legislature has taken aggressive action to limit use of the SAT and other standardized tests of academic readiness for college. In 1997, Texas passed the "Top Ten" law that requires all public-supported colleges and universities to admit applicants who are members of the top ten percent of their graduating class by school grade – without regard for standardized scores of college readiness tests. A report issued by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board encouraged the passage of this legislation, noting "use of standardized tests unduly limits admission" because they impose "a chilling effect on the motivations and aspirations of underserved populations."<sup>2</sup>

During the 2000-2001 Texas legislative session, elected representatives attempted to further reduce the use of standardized tests in college admissions. House Bill 1946 was approved by the House Education Committee but failed to garner enough votes to pass in the full Texas House. If enacted, it would have prohibited state-supported institutions of higher education from placing more than 20 percent weight on SAT scores in determining the admission of any student. The preface of the House Education Committee report noted, "there is concern that colleges and universities

place too much emphasis on an applicant's standardized test scores in admitting or rejecting an application. Standardized testing results may be misleading as indicators of potential college performance."<sup>3</sup>

While the Texas legislature's statutory involvement rises, use of achievement testing for college proficiency has been progressively diminished by many colleges and universities in Texas. In 1996, Texas A & M University and the University of Texas at Austin revised their admission policies to accept students on the basis of personal attributes such as extracurricular activities, family background, work experience, leadership, community service, and personal traits, as well as scores of college readiness.<sup>4</sup> The University of Texas-Pan American adopted a policy to waive standardized test scores and admit all Texas public school students who complete the Recommended High School Program. Sul

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<sup>2</sup> "Texas reduced emphasis on tests applauded" Austin American Statesman. Jodi Berls, September 28, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> HBA-KDB C.S.H.B. 1946 77 (R), Committee Report (Substituted), Office of House Bill Analysis, Texas House of Representatives, April 4, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> "UT, A&M admission regulations now looking beyond grades" San Antonio-Express News. Associated Press, August 9, 1996; and "Admissions change at UT ups the ante for hopefuls" Austin American Statesman. Mary Ann Roser, November 25, 1996.

minimum test scores,<sup>5</sup> and by the close of 1998, almost one third of Texas' colleges and universities had fully eliminated the use of standardized test scores for admission purposes.<sup>6</sup> The University of Texas at San Antonio recently announced the university could "dump" the use of standardized scores in college admission decisions. Expressing worry that "we have leaned too much toward SAT scores," UTSA President Ricardo Romo noted, "it's not as useful a tool as we think it is."<sup>7</sup>

New college admission policies and the Texas legislature's "ten percent" law were born from the 1996 "Hopwood Case." In *Hopwood*, the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals barred the University of Texas School of Law from using affirmative action in college admission procedures, and the Texas Attorney General issued an opinion that this decision applied to all state-supported institutions of higher education.<sup>8</sup> To eliminate race-based admissions while protecting minority enrollment, colleges and universities developed new non-academic admissions criteria that would boost minority acceptance.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to the Hon. Rick Perry, Lieutenant Governor of Texas from the University of Texas-Pan American, Division of Enrollment and Student Services, June 28, 2000; and "SAT, ACT becoming none of the above" San Antonio Express-News. Russell Gold, August 7, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> "College entrance tests said unfair to some" San Antonio Express-News. Cecelia Balli, November 30, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> "Texas colleges weight move to scrap the SAT" San Antonio Express-News. Matt Flores, February 21, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *Texas After Hopwood: Revisiting Affirmative Action* "House Research Organization, Austin, April 22, 1997.

## NATIONAL BATTLEGROUND

Efforts to eliminate the SAT are evident throughout the nation. In April 2001, the National Urban League issued a statement to urge college admission on the basis of "integrity, determination and leadership. The League urged colleges to stop using SAT scores that "wrongly prevent deserving students of all races and ethnicities from attending college."<sup>9</sup> Hugh B. Price, president of the National Urban League, announced, "corporate America has much to teach colleges and universities about what merit means in the real world."<sup>10</sup>

Also in April, a group of Fortune 1000 corporations – a group that included Bank of America, Sears Roebuck and Co., and Verizon Communications – sent a letter to 700 colleges and universities to ask that the SAT be dropped from college admission procedures. The letter said, "As many studies have shown, gatekeeper tests are an inadequate and unreliable predictor of productivity and prosperity."<sup>11</sup>

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The Alliance for Childhood joined the April effort in publishing a call to prohibit high stakes testing. It warned that standardized tests fail to provide a "meaningful,

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<sup>9</sup> "Corporate Leaders Decry Emphasis on SATs" Education Week. John Gehring, April 18, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

authentic measurement of knowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

Endorsing this statement was TheodoreSizer, founder, Coalition of Essential Schools; David Elkind, former president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children; Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education; Marilyn Benoit, president-elect of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Robert J. Sternberg, IBM Professor of Psychology and Education, and director of the Center for Psychology of Abilities, Competencies and Expertise at Yale University; Jonathan Kozol, author of *Savage Inequities*; and Miren Uriarate, director, Maurice Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts.<sup>13</sup>

The American Education Research Association and the Stanford University Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity followed in May 2001 with a challenge for colleges and universities to ensure degrees are “distributed in a fair and just manner,” considering “group membership as well as individual merit.”<sup>14</sup>

These calls were heard. In California, a state admissions policy was established to guarantee the top four percent of every graduating class will be accepted by public universities and

colleges, based on school grades.<sup>15</sup> Richard Atkinson, president of the University of California, followed with a proposal to drop the SAT entirely because it causes “unfairness” and does not measure what students learn in high school.<sup>16</sup>

Efforts to disqualify the SAT from college admission procedures began in earnest approximately two years ago when governors and the federal government weighed into the debate. During the 1999 national conference of the Education Commission of the States (a sister organization to the National Governor’s Association), Commissioner Frank Newman called for higher education to find alternatives to the SAT and like tests. Mr. Newman warned “those SAT scores don’t tell you everything” and noted “the student must be judged on how effective this person is going to be.”<sup>17</sup> In early 2000, the U.S. Department of Education challenged colleges and universities with loss of federal funds if standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT are used in admission decisions that “fail to produce proportional representation by race and gender.”<sup>18</sup> The testing guide produced by the Office of Civil Rights advised that an evaluation of “educational necessity” and “practical alternatives” must be produced whenever the percentage of minority students selected on the basis of a test is significantly and adversely

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<sup>12</sup> *High Stakes Testing: A Statement of Concern and Call to Action*, Alliance for Childhood, April 25, 2001, <http://www.allianceforchildhood.net/news>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell Change et al. *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Higher Education*. American Educational Research Association Panel Report on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities, American Education Research Association, California, 2001, Page i and ii.

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<sup>15</sup> “The SAT Showdown” *Newsweek*, Barbara Kantrowitz and Donna Foote, March 5, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> “SAT a valid gauge of college performance, analysis finds” *L.A. Times.com*, May 2, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> “Alternatives to Student Admission Tests Sought” *Detroit Free Press*, Peggy Walsch-Sarnecki, July 14, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> “The Feds Strike Back” *U.S. News and World Report*, John Leo, May 31, 1999.

affected.<sup>19</sup>

While some states have enacted legislative alternatives to the SAT (Texas, California and Florida) by establishing automatic enrollment for a percentage of high school graduates, others have developed admission policies de-emphasizing SAT and other standardized test scores. Admission to public universities and colleges in Oregon and Georgia is now based on high school portfolios that feature class assignments and projects.<sup>20</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Association of American Universities have undertaken a cooperative project to help colleges identify the knowledge and skills needed for collegiate success.<sup>21</sup> A group of nine universities, which includes Penn State, University of Michigan, Rutgers, and Beloit, is participating in a national pilot to test performance-based alternatives to the SAT test. One alternative is to work in a group to build a robot from Legos as a demonstration of college readiness.<sup>22</sup>

Today, few admission decisions are dependent on SAT scores, although more than 1.26 million students took the SAT in 2000, and 83 percent of four-year colleges report using scores as a factor in admission.<sup>23</sup> Of the 3,600 colleges and universities in the nation, at least 383 have completely eliminated SAT and other

standardized scores of college readiness tests from admission decisions.<sup>24</sup> In Texas, 32 colleges and universities have eliminated the SAT from admission decisions.<sup>25</sup>

A recent study of admission policies used by colleges throughout the nation found that three-fourths give significant preference to minority student applicants.<sup>26</sup> Another review of admission procedures reports "almost all" colleges and universities use multiple criteria that include personal attributes and accomplishments in admission decisions, as well as SAT scores.<sup>27</sup>

## THE SAT AND SIGNS OF EDUCATIONAL FAILURE

The SAT occupies a unique niche in Texas. Unlike most states,<sup>28</sup> Texas does not administer an annual, nationally-normed

<sup>19</sup> *Non-Discrimination in High Stakes Testing: A Resource Guide*, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> "K-12 and college expectations often fail to mesh" *Education Week*, May 9, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "College testing via Lego-building - yeah, right" *Jewish World Review*. Kathleen Parker, February 14, 2000, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com>.

<sup>23</sup> "SAT Math Scores for 2000 Hit 30 Year High" *The College Board News 2001-2001*, the College Board, May 18, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> "Low-Key ACT Avoids Uproar on College Test" *Education Week*. John Gehring, June 13, 2001. This data was published by FairTest.

<sup>25</sup> "College entry tests said unfair to some" *San Antonio Express-News*. Cecelia Balli, November 30, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Lerner and Althea K. Nagai. *Pervasive Preferences: Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Undergraduate Admissions Across the Nation*, The Center for Equal Opportunity, Washington, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> "Testing the SAT" *Houston Chronicle*, April 29, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Most states use two tests to measure performance of public schools, a criterion-referenced test and a national norm-referenced test. Using both types of test gives states the information needed to validate their criterion test, compare state-by-state educational performance, and calibrate state progress according to external, independent measures. *Annual State Survey, Student Assessment Programs*, Council of Chief State School Officers, Vol. 1, 2000.

standardized achievement test (such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in public schools. To measure

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educational progress and accredit schools, Texas relies solely on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test (TAAS), a criterion-referenced test that is developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). TAAS is not norm-referenced, not fully standardized, and has no national benchmarks that would allow student performance in Texas to be compared with performance of students in other states.

Unlike the TAAS, the SAT is a fully standardized and norm-referenced test with national benchmarks – and the SAT is taken by a large population of high school seniors in Texas. As such, the SAT provides the only broad-scale, standardized picture of academic achievement in Texas public schools that can be used to compare Texans with classmates of other states.

The SAT paints a very different picture of student achievement than the TAAS. TAAS scores are high and growing higher annually, while the SAT is below national average, and declining. The contrast is unexpected. Although the two tests measure different grade-level skills (TAAS – grade 10 and SAT – Grade 12), both measure mathematics and reading skills. Increases in TAAS scores should be mirrored by increases in the SAT, but this has not occurred.

Sagging SAT scores tarnish the shine on what has been called the “Texas miracle.” Low and falling SAT scores provoke questions about the effectiveness of public education reform – questions that are unwelcome among individuals

whose livelihood or re-election depends on school reform. Various explanations are offered for low, declining SATs that contrast with the soaring TAAS. The SAT doesn’t measure what students are learning, or the SAT doesn’t measure what the TAAS is testing. The most frequent explanation, advanced by both the present and former Commissioners of Education, attributes low and unimproved SAT scores to the high percentage of students taking the test in Texas.<sup>29</sup>

These explanations fail to quell questions about the effectiveness of a decade-long program of public school reform that was founded on the introduction of “more rigorous” state curriculum standards and a statewide system of School-to-Work. Figure 1 graphically reveals that average academic achievement of high school graduates is declining and the achievement gap between student groups is widening, as minority scores fall in Texas.

A comparison of different student groups within Texas public schools corresponds closely to the comparison of students of Texas public schools with their peers throughout the nation. Figure 2 lists average SAT composite scores of the nation’s five lowest and five highest performing states. This list ranks states according to average SAT scores, even though the College Board cautions against comparing or ranking states on the basis of SAT scores.<sup>30</sup> The College Board has yet to provide an explanation for claiming this comparison is statistically incorrect despite several requests by this author.

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<sup>29</sup> “More students take the ACT exam: scores see rise” San Antonio Express-News. Associated Press, August 19, 1998; and “Texas loses ground on SAT scores” The Dallas Morning News. Terrence Stutz, August 30, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> “Cautions on the Use of Aggregate SAT Scores” The College Board Online, 1999 at <http://www.collegeboard.org/press/senior99/html/caution.html>.

Figure 1

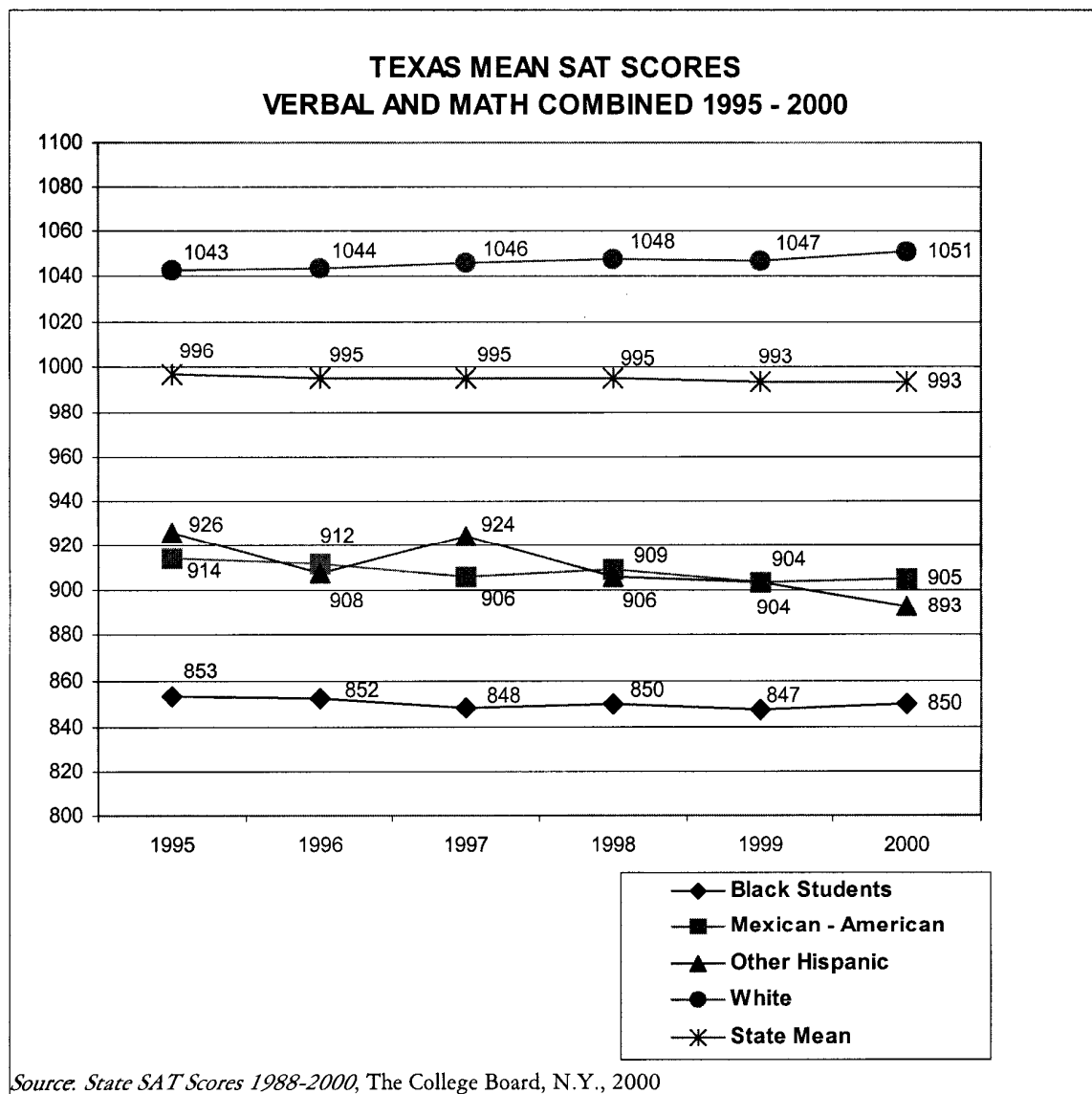


Figure 2

| Composite Mathematics and Verbal Mean Scores<br>of Five Lowest and Highest Ranking States |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| State   | Combined SAT Score<br>Spring 2000 |
| South Carolina  | 966                               |
| Georgia   | 974                               |
| District of Columbia  | 980                               |
| North Carolina  | 988                               |
| Texas   | 993                               |
| Nation  | 1019                              |
| Kansas  | 1154                              |
| Minnesota   | 1175                              |
| Wisconsin   | 1181                              |
| Iowa  | 1189                              |
| North Dakota  | 1197                              |
| <i>Source: State SAT Scores 1988-2000, The College Board, N.Y., 2000.</i>                 |                                   |

Are Texas' disappointing scores caused by a large number or high percentage of minority students taking the test? This notion is not supported by state data shown in Figure 3, which identifies 16 states with significantly higher SAT scores that have higher percentages of students taking the SAT.



Figure 3

| SAT: Percent Test-Takers, Composite Scores and<br>Percent Non-White Test-Takers |                        |                                |  |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| State   | Percent<br>Test-Takers | Composite<br>SAT Score<br>2000 | Percent<br>Non-White<br>Test-Takers 1999 |
| New Jersey  | 81%                    | 1011                           | 46%                                      |
| Pennsylvania  | 70%                    | 995                            | 25%                                      |
| Massachusetts   | 78%                    | 1024                           | 34%                                      |
| New York  | 77%                    | 1000                           | 49%                                      |
| New Hampshire   | 72%                    | 1039                           | 24%                                      |
| Rhode Island  | 71%                    | 1005                           | 30%                                      |
| Vermont   | 70%                    | 1021                           | 24%                                      |
| Maine   | 68%                    | 1004                           | 19%                                      |
| Maryland  | 65%                    | 1016                           | 49%                                      |
| Virginia  | 67%                    | 1009                           | 41%                                      |
| Delaware  | 66%                    | 998                            | 35%                                      |
| Georgia   | 64%                    | 974                            | 45%                                      |
| North Carolina  | 64%                    | 988                            | 36%                                      |
| Indiana   | 60%                    | 999                            | 20%                                      |
| South Carolina  | 59%                    | 966                            | 40%                                      |
| Florida   | 55%                    | 998                            | 48%                                      |
| Oregon  | 54%                    | 1054                           | 27%                                      |
| Hawaii  | 53%                    | 1007                           | 87%                                      |
| Washington  | 52%                    | 1054                           | 32%                                      |
| Texas   | 52%                    | 993                            | 49%                                      |
| <i>Source: State SAT Scores 1988-2000, The College Board, N.Y., 2000.</i>       |                        |                                |  |

Three states with an equal or higher percentage of minority test-takers and a larger total population of high school graduates taking the SAT have significantly higher SAT scores than Texas (Hawaii, Maryland and New York). While the data does show some correlation between the high percentage of minority test-takers and lower SAT scores, the correlation is not absolute nor is this a dependent function as required for a causal relationship.

No empirical research, in fact, establishes a causal relationship between large numbers or percentages of test-takers and low scores; nor is there any research showing that large minority testing populations cause low scores. Research does, however, establish a causal relationship between low standardized test scores and low academic proficiency.<sup>31</sup> Low SAT scores result from test-takers who are not equipped with sufficient skills in mathematics, vocabulary and reading comprehension.

### UNPARDONABLE OFFENSES

Last year 108,919 students, a number representing 52 percent of all seniors in public schools, took the SAT in Texas. These students are the most highly educated of high school graduates and represent the best effort of Texas public schools. The results reveal students in Texas are less well academically prepared than their counterparts in other states. Results also reveal that academic proficiency of students in Texas has not improved but instead fallen since 1995.

Texans have shown a willingness to tolerate under-performance in public schools, probably

bolstered by the apparent gains in student achievement reported on TAAS tests. Moreover, Texans have not disparaged official "explanations" for low SAT scores. Questions about the education of minority students, however, stimulate widespread concern. Class action suits to ensure equitable school funding and unbiased testing demonstrate strong sentiment about educational inequities in Texas (*Edgewood Independent School District v. Lionel R. Meno, et. al.*, and *G.I. Forum, et. al. v. Texas Education Agency, et. al.*).<sup>32</sup> Because a wide and growing achievement gap between student groups is revealed by the SAT, scores pose a real threat to the status quo in education.

SAT scores of black and Hispanic students are far lower than scores posted by white public school students, as shown in Figure 1. Each year, slowly declining SAT scores push this educational

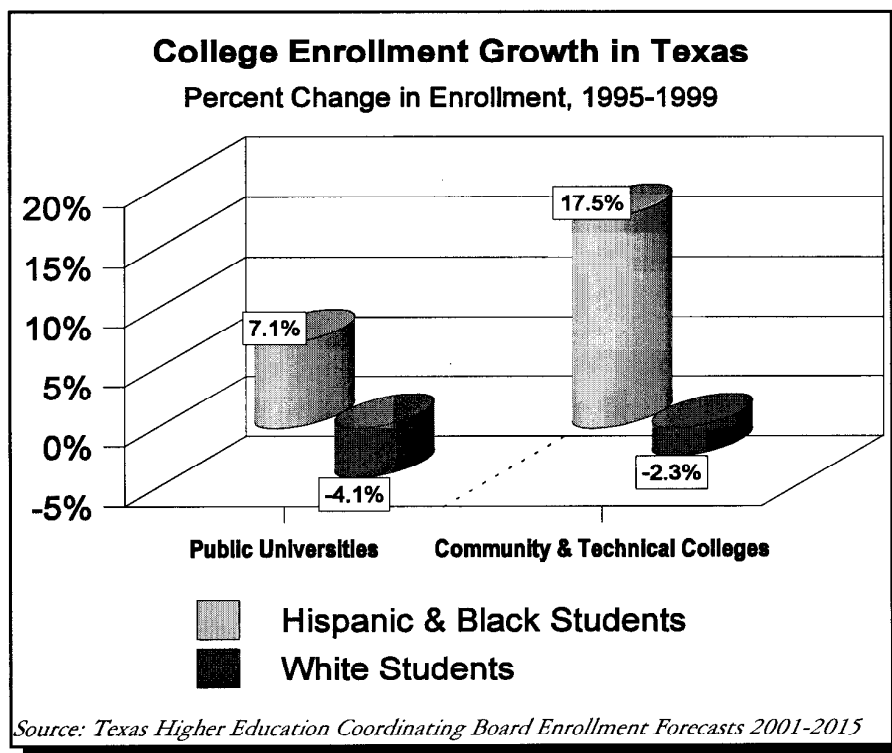
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<sup>31</sup> Gregory Cizek, *Filling in the Blanks: Putting Standardized Tests to the Test*, The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Washington, October 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Walt Haney, *The Myth of the Texas Miracle in Education*, *Education Policy Archives*, Vol. 8, No. 41, 2000; *Financing Public Education in Texas*, Legislative Budget Board, Austin, 1999, Pages 25-27; *Edgewood Independent School District v. Lionel R. Meno, et. al.* Supreme Court of Texas, No. 94-0152. Austin, Texas. January 30, 1995; and 557 Constitution; Title VI; *Education GI Forum, et al. v. Texas Education Agency, et al.*, SA-97-CA-1278-EP (Prado, January 7, 2000).

gap wider, and while academic proficiency of minority students declines, the rate of college enrollment has climbed for black and Hispanic students as shown in Figure 4.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 4



Although an increasing number of black and Hispanic students are enrolling in Texas public colleges and universities, a significant gap remains between white and minority enrollment, as well as graduation. White enrollment, now at 5 percent of the white population group in Texas, continues to exceed the rate of Hispanic (3.6 percent) and black (4.3 percent) enrollment within their population groups.<sup>34</sup> This is a far more critical problem than immediately appears. As population shifts transform Texas to a minority-majority state as predicted by the year 2008, the total college enrollment rate will fall unless Hispanic and black student enrollment is significantly elevated. To close the education gap between student populations while maintaining today's total enrollment rate, Texas must raise Hispanic enrollment by 2.5 times and increase black enrollment by 2.3 times.<sup>35</sup>

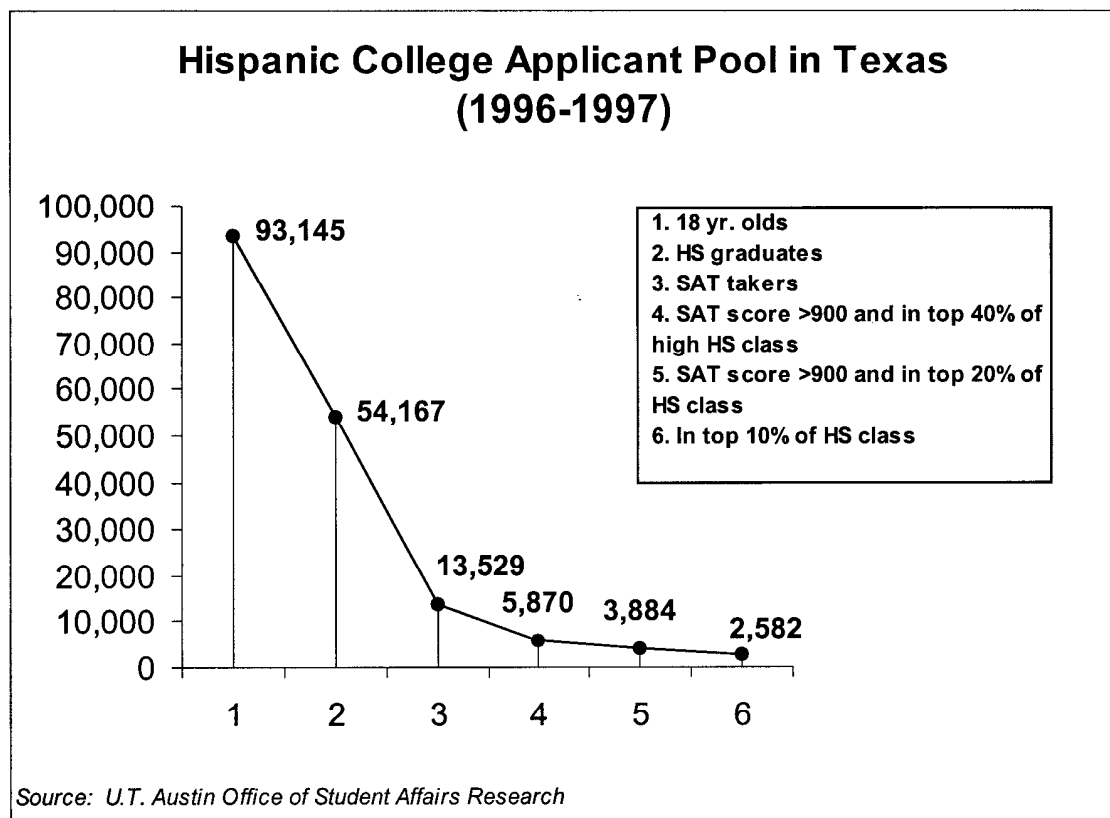
<sup>33</sup> *Enrollment Forecasts 2000-2015*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Study Paper 27, Austin, 2001, page i.

<sup>34</sup> *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin, 2000, Pages 6, 7 and 12.

<sup>35</sup> "Access to higher ed promoted" *San Antonio Express-News*. Matt Flores, October 25, 2000.

Rapid and dramatic increases in minority enrollment will not succeed if college acceptance is based on SAT scores currently posted by minority students or even by students qualified for enrollment by membership in the top ten percent of a graduating class, as shown by Figure 5.

Figure 5

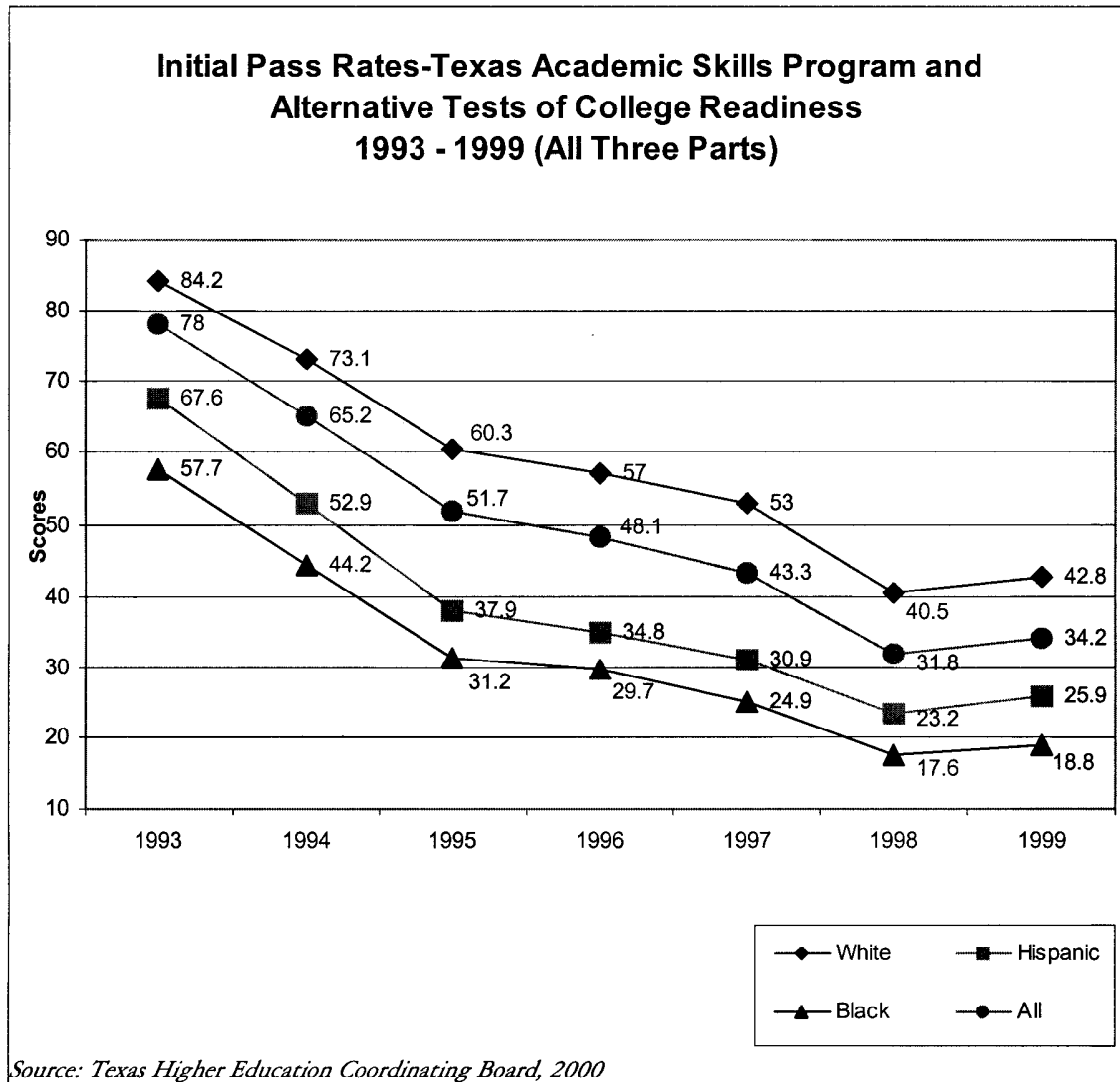


If Texas increases college enrollment by expanding current admission policies that favor personal attributes instead of accepting students on the basis of the SAT and academic qualifications, the graduation rate will sharply fall unless higher education shifts instructional emphasis to remedial education or reduces academic standards for graduation.

### ACHIEVEMENT, RACE, AND EDUCATION

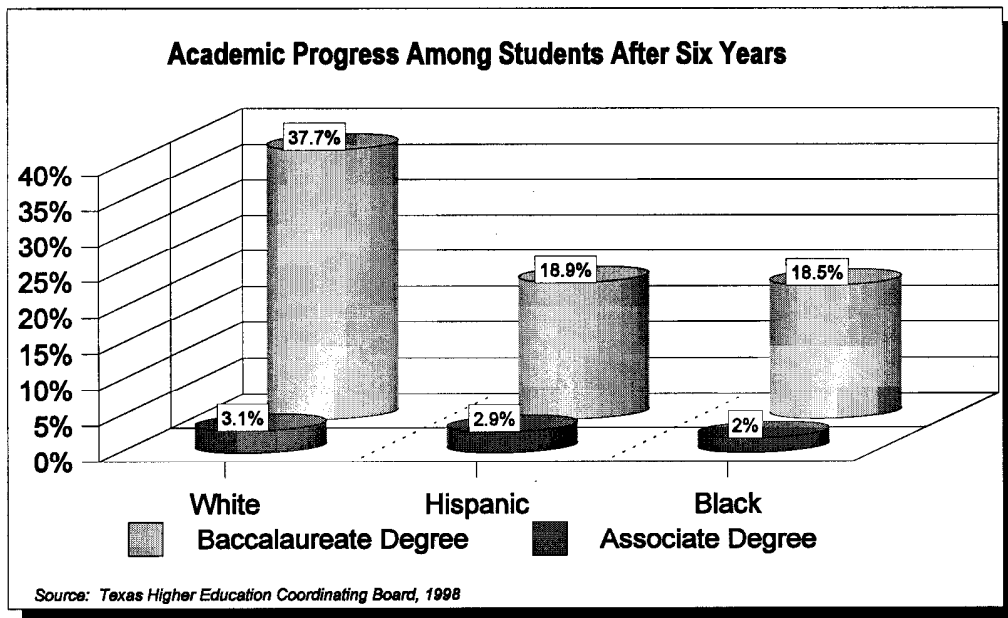
In Texas, a significantly higher percentage of Hispanic and black students require college remedial courses than do their white counterparts. Figure 6. shows the low and declining rate at which all student populations pass the TASP (Texas Academic Skills Program) test and alternative tests. The TASP and approved alternatives are tests that all graduates of public schools in Texas must pass before taking credit-bearing courses in state-supported colleges and universities. Students may be exempted, however, by meeting minimum scores set for TAAS, SAT or ACT.

Figure 6



As can be predicted from the academic deficiencies identified by the TASP test and SAT scores, minority students are significantly less successful in completing higher education than white students. A longitudinal study of 72,000 students who graduated from Texas public high schools in 1991, as shown in Figure 7, reveals the academic progress of this class through higher education.

Figure 7



The latest report on graduation rates for students in Texas public universities and colleges offers a total graduation rate of 47 percent for students in baccalaureate programs and almost 9 percent for community and technical colleges in Texas.<sup>36</sup> According to studies of graduation rates throughout the nation, Texas' rate is significantly below the national average; Texas ranks third lowest in the nation, according to a recent study of colleges and universities that was conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.<sup>37</sup> This analysis finds only 30 percent

of all 18 to 24 year-old Texans enroll in college (39 percent of white students and 22 percent of other races), compared to 42 percent nationally; in Texas only 43 percent of college freshmen graduate from college, compared to 66 percent of their peers throughout the nation.

The discouraging rate of graduation from Texas' universities and colleges is related in part to the low percentage of students who successfully complete "developmental" education required when students fail to pass the TASP test. In 1999, only 29 percent completed remedial courses and passed the TASP test on successive attempts, an increase from 27 percent in 1996.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Statewide and National Perspectives on Higher Education in Texas*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin, Charts 4 and 5, <http://www.thebc.state.tx.us/divisions/planning/HEperspectives>

<sup>37</sup> *Measuring Up 2000: The State-By-State Report Card for Higher Education*, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Washington, 2001.

<sup>38</sup> *Appropriations for Developmental Education in Texas Public Institutions of Higher Education*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin, 2000. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$182.8 million dollars for developmental education during the 2000-2001 biennium, up from \$38.5 million during the 1988-1989 biennium.

Weak high school academics bear the lion's share of responsibility for low college completion, according to research published by Dr. Omar Lopez, Director of the College Success Initiative of Just for the Kids. His research examines the class of 1997 and finds "there is a limited pool of qualified Texas high school graduates prepared for college."<sup>39</sup> These academic deficiencies cause low SAT scores, limited success in remedial courses to improve college readiness, and low college completion.

Examining high school course taking, tests of college readiness, and first-year college retention of graduates from Texas public schools, this study finds less than one-quarter of the students who took the advanced academic curriculum (including physics, calculus and Advanced Placement courses designated as "college preparatory") scored as academically ready for college on TASP, SAT and ACT tests.<sup>40</sup>

The study also found that black and Hispanic students scored significantly lower on tests of college readiness, although the students took what appeared to be the same curriculum (i.e. with the same course titles) as their white classmates in other schools.<sup>41</sup> Academic courses are "not equal across Texas public high schools," according to page 11 of the Just for the Kids report. Although state law establishes a core list of courses required for graduation (Foundation Curriculum) and state curriculum standards identify specific academic expectations for

student learning (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), what students are taught in one and the same course (Algebra I, for example) significantly varies from school to school and from class to class within schools. Findings published by Just for the Kids appear to indicate that classes with high concentrations of minority students teach weaker course content than is taught in schools that are largely attended by white students.

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*"... there is a limited pool of qualified Texas high school graduates prepared for college."*

– Dr. Omar Lopez

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Evidence of curriculum inequities appears corroborated by ACT state reports that show scores posted by black and Hispanic students are significantly lower than white students while taking the same "core" courses.<sup>42</sup> This achievement gap within student populations in Texas is, according to ACT reports, replicated between Texans and students attending schools in other states. Students who took "core" courses in math, science, social studies and English in Texas public high schools score at a significantly lower level than their peers in other states who took the same courses.<sup>43</sup>

Weak curriculum is not just a problem of urban schools or schools with large concentrations of minority students in Texas. Expectations for grade-level learning, established by state curriculum standards and assessments, are significantly below national benchmarks. According to

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<sup>39</sup> Omar S. Lopez. *The Relationship of the Texas High School Curriculum to College Readiness: An Update-Implications for Increasing Student College Participation and Success*, Just for the Kids, Austin, 2000, Page 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, Page 10.

<sup>41</sup> *The Relationship of the Texas High School Curriculum to College Readiness*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin, 1999.

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<sup>42</sup> *ACT Texas Profile 2000*, ACT, Inc, Iowa, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

national norm-referenced tests (the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Stanford 9) administered annually by Houston and Dallas Independent School Districts, students at grade-level in Texas are generally one to two years below the national average established for grade-level achievement.<sup>44</sup>

Weak curriculum hurts all students, but most particularly minority students. Grade inflation – the pernicious practice of lowering academic standards while raising grades – is a symptom of weak curriculum standards and a pronounced problem for minority students in Texas. Studies of the correlation between course performance and TAAS scores, conducted once every two years by the TEA, reveal a shockingly high percentage of students failed the TAAS but were given passing school grades (up to 30 percent). Grades of minority students, and students in urban schools, however, suffered a higher rate of inflation than white classmates in suburban schools.<sup>45</sup> Evidence of exaggerated grade inflation for students attending schools with high

concentrations of minority populations strongly suggests lower academic standards are set for black and Hispanic students.

## THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The achievement gap occupies center stage in all discussions about public schools and higher education. Performance differences between white and minority test-takers on standardized tests are particularly critical to high-stakes decisions such as grade-level promotion, high school graduation and college enrollment. Because college degrees confer immense economic and social advantage, the most critical of high-stakes decisions involves college admission. The SAT, as a consequence, serves as the gatekeeper for advantage.

SAT scores show distinct performance differences by race and ethnicity. On the average, white students score 194 points higher than black students and 141 points higher than Hispanic students throughout the nation.<sup>46</sup> The achievement gap has been evident since the SAT was first administered and has slowly widened since 1990.<sup>47</sup> The achievement gap is not unique to SAT; it is also evident on all other standardized tests, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).<sup>48</sup>

What is the cause of performance differences between student groups? The “Coleman Report”

<sup>44</sup> *TEA Position on Using TAAS Data and TAAS-Norm Referenced Comparisons*, Education Committee Report, Dallas Public Schools, Dallas, February 9, 1999; *Stanford Group Report for Houston ISD*, October 1997-March 2000, Houston Independent School District, reports obtained through Public Information Request; and *District Summaries, Norm-Referenced Tests (ITBS/TAP), Spring 1998 and 1998* and *District Summaries, Norm-Referenced Tests (Stanford 9), Spring 1999 and 2000*, reports obtained through Public Information Request.

<sup>45</sup> *1996 Comprehensive Biennial Report on Texas Public Schools*, Texas Education Agency, Pages 14-16; *1998 Comprehensive Biennial Report on Texas Public Schools*, Texas Education Agency, Pages 15-18; *A Study of the Correlation of Course Performance and TAAS Performance on the Grade 3 TAAS Reading Test*, Texas Education Agency, 2000; and *A Study of the Correlation between Course Performance in Algebra I and Algebra I End-of-Course Test Performance*, Student Performance Results, 1998-1999, Texas Education Agency.

<sup>46</sup> “Civil Rights Enforcers Get Testy” *Investors Business Daily*. Anna Bray, July 26, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> “30-Year-High SAT Scores Linked to Rigorous Coursetaking” *Education Week*. John Gehring, September 6, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> “TIMSS and NAEP studies highlight inequities” *American School Board Journal*, June 2001.



stands as landmark research on this question and serves as the foundation of desegregation policy in public schools. Commissioned in 1964 by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* found that academic achievement of black students who attended integrated schools was significantly higher than their counterparts in all-black schools; Findings of this report suggest both school and student characteristics (such as family income) influence achievement differences.<sup>49</sup>

The quest to explain achievement differences has continued since the 1960s, with research focused on the influence of schools on student achievement. A survey of the research was recently conducted by the College Board; *Group Differences in Standardized Testing and Social Stratification* suggests that achievement differences between student populations is caused by "inequitable access to high-quality education."<sup>50</sup>

This hypothesis is supported by a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, published last year under the title *Answers in the Tool Box*. Researchers examined student records to determine what factors best predict college completion, and their findings defied conventional ideas about minority achievement. They found that the academic courses studied by a student in high school outweigh all other variables popularly believed to determine

educational outcomes—including race, ethnicity, family income and parents' education. Their data, unexpectedly, reveals that minority students who enrolled in the most rigorous academic high school courses completed college at a higher rate than their white counterparts.<sup>51</sup>

The relationship between classroom instruction and minority achievement is well documented by research sponsored by the U.S.

Department of Education. *Project Follow Through* was designed to identify which educational programs best supported and improved academic achievement of disadvantaged students.<sup>52</sup> The world's largest, longest and most expensive educational experiment ever conducted, *Project Follow Through*,

began in 1967 and concluded in 1995 at the cost of \$1 billion; almost 700,000 students from grades one to three participated in 22 different types of educational programs.<sup>53</sup> *Project Follow*

*...minority students who enrolled in the most rigorous academic high school courses completed college at a higher rate than their white counterparts.*

<sup>49</sup> "Out-of-School Influences on Learning Debated" *Education Week*. Debra Viadero, June 13, 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Wayne Camara and Amy Elizabeth Schmidt. *Group Differences in Standardized Testing and Social Stratification*, The College Board Report No. 99-5, The College Board, N.Y., 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Clifford Adelman. *Answers in the Toolbox*, The United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, 2001, Pages v-xi.

<sup>52</sup> Bonnie Grossen. *The Story Behind Project Follow Through*, *Effective School Practices*, Vol. 15, No.1, Winter, 1996, Page 4; Billy Tashman. *Our Failure to Follow Through*, *Effective School Practices*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 1996, page 67; Cathy Watkins. *Project Follow Through*, *Behavior Monographs*, Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, Cambridge, 1997, Abstract and Pages 34-60; Geoffrey Bock. Excerpts from the Abt Reports: *Descriptions of the Models and Summary of Results*, *Effective School Practices*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 1996, Pages 10-15 and Wesley Becker and Siegfried Englemann. *Sponsor Findings from Project Follow Through*, *Effective School Practices*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 1996, Page 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

*Through* found that minority students benefit most from explicit, organized, and intensive academics in a teacher-led classroom. Findings also established evidence of the adverse impact on minority student achievement when these elements were not present; this adverse impact was found to be far greater for minority students than for their white counterparts. While the school has the strongest impact on student achievement, the students' circumstances also impact academic performance.

Rigorous academic curriculum and direct instruction are critical to the educational success of all students but most critical to the success of students who are economically disadvantaged. It is economic disadvantage — not race or ethnicity — that most directly correlates with academic achievement. Research indicates that children living in poverty have less access to formal learning opportunities, fewer resources, greater health problems and developmental delays, all of which adversely affect educational outcomes.<sup>54</sup> Economic disadvantage does not doom students to low academic achievement or poor educational outcomes, according to *Project Follow Through* and *Answers in the Toolbox*. Strong academic content, an academically-focused classroom, and teacher-led instruction can overcome the educational disadvantages imposed by economic circumstance. This important finding affixes responsibility for student success firmly on public schools.

## SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SAT

Why do Hispanic and black students score lower on the SAT than white students? Several notions have been advanced. The first is an idea that a defect or bias in test design causes minority students to post lower SAT scores. The second idea is that low scores are caused by a common lack of academic proficiency shared by minority students. Another idea is that differences in SAT scores between student groups reflect differences in intelligence.

The idea that student groups score differently on standardized tests because of differences in intelligence has absolutely no basis in fact, has never been empirically proven, and must be dismissed. However, the idea that minority groups lack the academic proficiency of white students is strongly supported by research, correlating test score differences with academic preparation. Research indicates it is academic, not intellectual, differences that cause an achievement gap between student groups.

The idea that the SAT test itself causes specific student groups to score differently than other groups is not proven or even suggested by empirical research. The test design (i.e., its validity and reliability) has been extensively researched over the past half century by experts of various fields. Their findings offer no evidence that the SAT is racist, a test of talent, a poor predictor of student success, unrelated to student learning, or easily inflated by test-taking drills.

<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey D. Borman, Sam Stringfield and Laura Rachuba. "Advancing Minority High Achievement: National Trends and Promising Programs and Practices," A Report Prepared for the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, the College Board, N.Y., 2000, Page 3.

The SAT is a test of cognitive ability or factual knowledge in the domains of mathematics, vocabulary and reading comprehension. It is not a test of intelligence (innate or biological) but a test of acquired knowledge. An analysis of more than 1,700

studies examining the validity and reliability of the SAT reveals the SAT is the best predictor of student achievement for college freshmen and college graduation.<sup>55</sup> The immense volume of empirical research corroborates the predictive validity of the SAT. This validity strongly argues that college studies and completion depends on prerequisite mathematics, reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. The SAT is, therefore, measuring meaningful academic knowledge and skills that are aligned with goals of higher education.

*Paradoxically, the most compelling evidence for the validity and reliability of the SAT is furnished by research conducted by advocates of affirmative action in college admissions.*

The SAT's validity argues as strongly for academic prerequisites as for a specific minimum level of academic proficiency. Students need the fundamental skills, measured by the SAT and taught in high school, to learn the more sophisticated content of college-level courses. Research investigating the SAT's reliability has also examined the effect of coaching on SAT scores. These studies, as well as additional studies conducted solely to determine the relationship between preparation and scores, found no evidence that SAT scores can be artificially manipulated or inflated – a practice that would

give unfair advantage to the wealthy if it was successful. These findings were recently published by Derek C. Briggs in the American Statistical Association's journal, *Chance*.<sup>56</sup>

Paradoxically, the most compelling evidence for the validity and reliability of the SAT is furnished by research conducted by advocates of affirmative action in college admissions. A study of affirmative action by former Princeton and Harvard presidents, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok examined 80,000 students enrolled in 28 colleges and universities from 1951 through 1989; the data furnished comprehensive proof that SAT scores are predictive of college performance.<sup>57</sup> After comprehensively reviewing the research on minority achievement, the American Education Research Association and the Stanford University Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity found empirical evidence of the predictive validity of the SAT and found no evidence that test preparation lowers the predictive validity.<sup>58</sup>

#### SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND EDUCATION REFORM

Minority enrollment in state-supported colleges and universities has increased since Texas introduced the "Top Ten Percent"

<sup>55</sup> Sarah A. Hezlett, Nathan R. Kuncel and Meredith et al. *The Effectiveness of the SAT in Predicting Success Early and Late in College*, presented at the 2001 AERA/NCME Annual Meeting, Seattle, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> "Study: Test Preparation Courses Raise Scores Only Slightly" *Education Week*, Mary Ann Zehr, April 4, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Linda Chavez, Robert Lerner et al. *Three Views of the River*, The Center for Equal Opportunity, Washington, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell Chang, Daria Witt et al. *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Higher Education*, American Education Research Association, 2001, Chapter 4, Page 10, <http://aera/net/reports>.

admissions law and diminished the role of SAT scores in admission policies affecting all applicants. New admission policies de-emphasize standardized measures of academic proficiency for personal characteristics, a policy that favors admission for black and Hispanic students.

These policies were designed to remedy the failure of minority students to gain admission based on academic qualifications and to establish student enrollment that is proportional to racial and ethnic populations within the state. Preferential policies, known as affirmative action, are based on the belief that unequal treatment is required to "level the playing field" for different groups. Preferential treatment is required, it is believed, to enable individuals to receive the socio-economic advantages to which they are entitled based on group membership.<sup>59</sup>

The SAT has been an impediment to affirmative action's efforts to eliminate admission criteria that adversely affect minority student enrollment. According to the National Coalition for Equity in Education, "the SAT is a capstone of an educational system that, in spite of the best intentions and dedication of many talented educators, serves to preserve economic inequality."<sup>60</sup> Beliefs that the SAT bars minority enrollment to higher education and threatens

educational diversity serve as the foundation of affirmative action.

Affirmative action and race-based admission has become commonplace in higher education. A recent study of admission procedures conducted by the Center for Equal Opportunity finds race-based, preferential policies are commonly used to increase the enrollment of black and Hispanic students.<sup>61</sup>

Although race-based preference is widely used in college admission decisions, it has abysmally failed to increase college graduation rates for minority students. A study of law schools conducted by Linda Wrightman found that students admitted under affirmative action were three times less likely to graduate.<sup>62</sup> The most

*Beliefs that the SAT bars minority enrollment to higher education and threatens educational diversity serve as the foundation of affirmative action.*

comprehensive study of college completion by minority students, conducted by William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, documented that minority students graduate at a significantly lower rate than white students and graduates have significantly lower grade-point-averages.<sup>63</sup> In Texas, college completion rates provide no evidence that non-academic admission criteria have increased the percentage of degrees awarded to black and Hispanic students.

<sup>59</sup> *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Higher Education*, Pages ii and 1, Chapter 1.

<sup>60</sup> "For Equality's Sake, the SAT should be Abolished" *Los Angeles Times*. Julian Weiss Glass, January 24, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> *Pervasive Preferences: Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Undergraduate Admissions Across the Nation*.

<sup>62</sup> "Let's Attack Merit" *U.S. News & World Report*. John Leo, November 27, 1997.

<sup>63</sup> *Three Views of the River*.

## SOCIAL REFORM AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Serving as the academic gatekeeper for higher education, the SAT has also proven an impediment for education leaders and policy-makers who work to align college requirements with high school curriculum that has moved away from academics known as Liberal Arts.

The dominant form of schooling today is known by a variety of labels – “progressivism,” “Student-centered learning,” or “constructivism.” This approach to public education was first popularized by John Dewey at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Progressive education promotes socialization as the primary purpose of education. It focuses on who individuals should be instead of equipping them with academic knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Preparing youth to become well-adjusted, effective workers, responsible family members, and contributing citizens is the purpose of progressive schooling, as is comprehensively described by leading chroniclers of education reform.<sup>65</sup>

In progressive classrooms, functional skills and applied learning take priority over intellectual development and academic learning. Academic instruction is often consigned to serving as a handmaiden for job training – with

math, science, social studies, and English language arts taught in the context of specific occupations, as required by the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994.<sup>66</sup> Progressive classroom practices consign teachers to the role of facilitators – helping students construct their own knowledge, instead of transmitting specific facts and skills associated with the Liberal Arts disciplines.<sup>67</sup>

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Progressive reforms have come to dominate classrooms in Texas public schools. The State Education Code now requires each public school student to master the skills and knowledge necessary for managing the dual roles of family member and wage earner and gaining entry-level employment or entering college.<sup>68</sup> School-to-Work, a new framework for classroom learning that combines academics with vocational training from kindergarten through high school, was implemented as statewide, systemic reform in

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<sup>64</sup> Progressive education is comprehensively described and its effectiveness researched by three highly respected academicians. Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, Simon & Schuster, N.Y., 2000; E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Achievement Challenge: The Schools We Need: Why We Don't Have Them*, Doubleday, N.Y., 1996; and Jeanne S. Chall, *The Academic What Really Works in the Classroom*, Guilford Press, NY, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> *The Academic Achievement Challenge*, Page 38.

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<sup>66</sup> *Academic Standards and School-to-Work, School-to-Work in Elementary Schools, School-to-Work in Middle Schools and Career Pathways in School-to-Work Systems*, Resource Bulletins, The National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center, Washington, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> *The Academic Achievement Challenge*, Pages 36-40; and *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform*, Pages 441-442.

<sup>68</sup> *Education Code*, Subchapter F. Career and Technology Education Program, 29.181 (1) and (2). Although this provision is listed under Career and Technology Education, the requirement applies to, as stated, “each public school student.”

1996.<sup>69</sup> Personal, social, and workplace skills that public schools are expected to teach all students, preferably combined with academics, are outlined in the state guidance counseling curriculum that was issued by the TEA in 1997.<sup>70</sup> Many school districts in Texas closely tailor high school academics to specific occupations; in 1997, the TEA issued a recommendation for all high schools to “require” students to select a career major by the end of eighth grade and to study academic courses that are specifically related to the selected occupation.<sup>71</sup>

Burdening public schools with social development and vocational instruction deflects public schools away from their academic mission, according to respected academicians. The failure of public schools to improve academic achievement results from progressive reforms that de-emphasize academics, according to noted scholars Jeanne Chall, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Diane Ravitch.

Because this failure is exposed by standardized tests, especially the SAT, it is unsurprising that advocates of progressive reform condemn the use of standardized tests. Progressive reformers charge that standardized

tests are not designed to measure important skills. Skills measured by standardized tests like the SAT have “little relevance for high school,” and, worse, tests that measure these skills (i.e., reading and mathematics) “inhibit education reform,” according to an editorial recently published in *Education Week*.<sup>72</sup>

The de-emphasis of academic instruction in

public schools and the diminished academic skills of graduates have adversely affected higher education. Academic courses, once considered remedial education, are now first year curriculum for all but the most advanced freshmen. Colleges report teaching high school mathematics to 60 percent of first year students.<sup>73</sup> Members of the National Association of Scholars chronicled the decline of academic standards in higher education throughout the past century, as colleges debased curriculum rigor to

meet the diminished academic proficiency of high school graduates.<sup>74</sup>

*Despite soaring TAAS scores and national acclaim for education reform, Texans widely acknowledge the low academic proficiency of high school graduates and many worry about the looming crisis in college completion.*

<sup>69</sup> *Texas School-to-Work, State Application for an Implementation Grant* Submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, 1996, Page 13.

<sup>70</sup> *A Model Developmental Guidance Program and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development, PreK-12th Grade*, Texas Education Agency, Austin, 1998.

<sup>71</sup> *Recommended High School Programs of Study*, Texas Education Agency, Austin, 1997.

<sup>72</sup> “High School and the SAT: Time for Reassessing Their Purposes?” *Education Week*, Joseph H. Crowley, April 11, 2001; this view is also reflected in “Connecting K-12 and College” *Education Week*, Jon E. Finney, May 7, 1997.

<sup>73</sup> *The Textbook Conundrum: What are the Children Learning and Who Decides?* Center for Education Reform, Washington, May 2001, Page 9.

<sup>74</sup> *The Dissolution of General Education: 1914-1993*. The National Association of Scholars, 1997, <http://www.nas.org>.

**FINDING THE WILL  
AND THE WAY  
TO WIN THE RACE FOR ACADEMICS**

Can you find a Texan satisfied with today's "improvements" in public schools? Even Diogenes, if he were alive today, would find this a daunting task. Despite soaring TAAS scores and national acclaim for education reform, Texans widely acknowledge the low academic proficiency of high school graduates and many worry about the looming crisis in college completion.

Standardized test scores and college graduation rates reveal the shockingly low academic proficiency of graduates of Texas public schools. Today's graduates generally lack the academic skills required to successfully complete college or to complete skilled vocational programs, and too few youth complete higher education. Educational outcomes for minority students are even worse.

Because standardized tests calibrate academic failure and adversely impact student opportunity, advocates of progressive reform and race-based college admissions oppose tests such as the SAT. As use of standardized tests decline, evidence of failure becomes scarce. Concealed from public view are low academic standards; curriculum inequities between student groups; an increased number of academically-weak college applicants; an increased number of students needing remedial college courses; and a decreased

percentage of Texans graduating from college. Evidence of failure has become particularly hard to detect in Texas because information about educational performance is largely based on results of a state-designed, criterion-based, state-reported test.

Based on results of education reforms introduced in Texas over the past decade, there is little reason to believe the academic proficiency of high school graduates and the rate of college completion will improve. Research offers no hope for progressive reforms to improve academic achievement, nor any hope that affirmative action will increase college graduation rates for minority students. Neither affirmative action nor progressive reform focuses efforts on improving academic learning.

*... parents and taxpayers share an understanding that knowledge of literature, mathematics, science, and history is the foundation that must be laid to develop an effective employee, a discerning voter, an involved citizen, a person of culture, a responsible parent, and a caring neighbor.*

Although it might appear that educators and policy leaders have given up on the teaching and learning of academics, there is no indication that Texans agree. To the contrary, there is strong evidence that parents and taxpayers share an understanding that knowledge of literature, mathematics, science, and history is the foundation that must be laid to develop an effective employee, a discerning voter, an involved citizen, a person of culture, a responsible parent, and a caring neighbor.

Public commitment – the will – exists for academic education. The way – a comprehensive body of research – also exists. *Answers in the Toolbox* offers unshakeable proof that all student populations learn when schools teach academics, and *Project Follow Through* furnishes

methods for teaching academics effectively and equitably.

Reclaiming public education for academic learning can achieve the unfulfilled goals of affirmative action. Offering rigorous academic studies to all students can level the playing field for college admission, and, more importantly, equip minority students with the academic proficiencies required to complete college. Reclaiming public education for academic learning can also achieve the equally unfulfilled goals of progressive reform; broad Liberal Arts studies (history, literature, mathematics and science) provide the strongest foundation for both social and intellectual development.

Armed with the knowledge that other states and industrialized nations – some with student populations as diverse as ours – successfully educate students of all races and ethnicities to high levels of academic proficiency, Texas can reconstitute public education to teach academics, confident in the knowledge that students will learn what schools teach.

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### ★ TACTICS FOR ACADEMIC REVOLUTION ★

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- ✓ Identify academic learning as the primary purpose of public schools in state law (demoting social and vocational instruction to secondary and optional instruction, taken after students have acquired proficiency in academics).
- ✓ Provide academic pre-school and kindergarten programs for economically-disadvantaged children, and provide after-school and extended school-year programs for academically-disadvantaged students.
- ✓ Develop school partnerships with local colleges and community organizations to provide academic support to academically-disadvantaged students.
- ✓ Place academically-disadvantaged students in classes led by teachers with the greatest academic expertise and teaching experience.
- ✓ Develop new state curriculum standards that are bench-marked at the same grade-level equivalent as states with the highest standardized test scores of college readiness; focus standards exclusively on academic knowledge and skills; identify subject-area content knowledge specific for each grade that becomes increasingly complex with successive grades; align elementary, secondary and college curriculum.



- ✓ Require the use of instructional practices or curricular programs that research has proven improve academic achievement and prohibit those that hamper high academic achievement, such as block scheduling and career magnet schools.
- ✓ Focus classrooms on academics with a 5 x 5 rule, devoting five hours a day and five days a week to Liberal Arts and Sciences. Designate athletic and socialization instruction as optional programs, scheduled before or after the academic school day.
- ✓ Administer a national norm-referenced standardized test, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, annually from grade 3 through 7; disaggregate by student populations and use scores to modify instruction to help disadvantaged students and standardize instruction in classes with high concentrations of minority students.
- ✓ Administer the ACT's Explore Test in 8th grade and the Plan in 10th grade to test subject area proficiency in English, math, reading and science to ensure curricula is aligned K to 14 and to identify student progress.
- ✓ Schedule test preparation as optional programs before or after the academic school day.
- ✓ Track student achievement by student groups in classes and schools to ensure curriculum and grade equity. Allow parents to transfer students to other classes and schools whenever achievement data shows evidence of inequity.
- ✓ Invite Just for the Kids to create "prep" programs in high schools for disadvantaged students.
- ✓ Restore the role of the SAT and other academic qualification requirements for state four-year colleges and universities. Eliminate remedial or developmental education at state four-year colleges and universities.
- ✓ Establish open enrollment policies at state community colleges and agreements for school districts to share costs of remedial/developmental education for students who attended the full four years of high school in one district.
- ✓ Develop new state teacher certification requirements for candidates to pass a specific number of college courses in a specific subject area before certification is awarded. Develop new certification tests that assess college-level proficiency in the subject area for which certification is awarded. Require Alternative Certification Programs to withhold provisional certification or to allow candidates to teach until the academic proficiency section of the ExCet test is passed.
- ✓ Establish intra-district school choice that allows parents to select schools with high academic achievement and educational equity. Establish in-school choice that allows parents to select teachers whose records demonstrate increased student performance.

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