



CHOICES in EDUCATION

TESTING, TESTING
COLLEGES ARE
RETHINKING
STANDARDIZED TESTS

PAGE 12

SOUNDS GOOD
IMPORTANT WAYS
MUSIC EDUCATION
HELPS STUDENTS

PAGE 10

PARENTING

How young children's vocabularies benefit from being read to

A recent study from researchers at The Ohio State University found that the disparity between the number of words young children who are frequently read to have heard compared to those who have not been read to is significant. The study first appeared online in the *Journal of Development and Behavioral Pediatrics* and found that young children whose parents read them five books a day entered kindergarten having heard roughly 1.48 million words. By comparison, children whose parents never read to them had heard just over 4,600 words by the time they entered kindergarten. Even children who are read to daily hear significantly fewer words than children whose parents read them five books a day. Such children hear just un-

der 300,000 words prior to entering kindergarten.

Exposure to a larger vocabulary is not the only benefit kids reap from being read to. Reach Out and Read, a national nonprofit that champions the positive effects of reading daily and engaging in additional language-rich activities with young children, reports that language-based interactions help children develop communication skills, patience, empathy, and literacy. Reading to young children also enhances their understanding of the world by transporting them to places and times they have never experienced.

One study also noted the effects that reading to young children can have on the relationship between parent and child. That study, authored

Reading to young children also enhances their understanding of the world by transporting them to places and times they have never experienced.

by researchers at the University of Wollongong in Australia and Boston University and published in the journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, found that reading to young children supports a strong relationship between parent and child.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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Exposure to a larger vocabulary is not the only benefit kids reap from being read to.

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PARENTING

Parents can help kids struggling with social media

Social media is a big part of young people's lives. Psychology Today reports that social media use is now the most common activity children and teenagers engage in, with the majority of users accessing social media platforms several times each day through their personal cell phones.

Social media has its benefits, and being able to keep in touch with friends and family remotely was one of the saving graces in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when people were isolating in their homes. But there's a dark side to social media as well. Recently leaked documents from Meta, the company that oversees social media giants Facebook and Instagram, suggest the company has known for

several years that its Instagram app is contributing to body image issues and other mental health problems for teens, particularly females. Social media platforms use algorithms to enhance users' engagement. Feeds may be driven toward polarizing topics or those that have the most shock value, further leading teens down a negative path.

The current tween and teen generation is faced with constant information being delivered right to their handheld devices. Children may not be developmentally ready for the immediate gratification that social media provides nor the constant onslaught of content. As a result, teens increasingly are becoming more irrita-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

ble, having trouble sleeping and are spending more time alone as a result of phone usage.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education says recent studies have

noted a significant uptick in depression and suicidal thoughts over the past several years for teens, especially those who spend multiple hours a day using screens.

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

- **Set real limits.** The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health suggests that until meaningful government oversight is in place to police social media platforms, parents will have to set their own parameters for use. Putting phones down at meal times, turning off alerts close to bedtime, and making certain days "a rest from technology" can help.

- **Block upsetting content.** It's a parent's job to be a parent, not a best friend. Giving in to requests to engage with certain social platforms, even when they do not align with

one's beliefs or values, can be harmful. Set limits on which platforms children are allowed to use.

- **Regularly monitor kids' usage.** Parents should look through their kids' phones and accounts on a regular basis to see which sites are being visited and how kids are engaging with others. If social media is affecting a child's mental health, have him or her take a break or delete the account.

Social media is ever-present in kids' lives. Parents and other caregivers have to find a way to assist struggling tweens and teens with social media so it does not become a detriment to their overall health.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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CAREER PATHWAYS

Explore career paths in the agriculture sector

As the world population grows, the role of the agricultural sector will become even more prominent. There should be significant demand for agricultural professionals capable of meeting the challenges facing the world as it confronts climate change and food shortages. That makes now a perfect time for students to explore potential career paths in the agricultural sector.

▪ **Agricultural engineer:** Agricultural engineers employ engineering principles to solve issues related to agricultural production. An agricultural engineer may design facilities or machinery or develop solutions to address problems related to irrigation and soil conservation, among other projects. Students interested in a career as an agricultural engineer can expect to study mathematics, physics, chemistry, computer engineering, and, of course, engineering analysis and design as they pursue their degrees.

▪ **Agronomist:** Agronomists work with crops and soil management and may work as analysts, environmentalists or forecasters. Agronomists may be tasked with analyzing soil structure and chemistry and study how water is moving within soil. Students will study agriculture, biology, chemistry, and physics en route to earning a degree that will help them become an agronomist. Mathematics also will be part of their studies, and statistics courses will be part of those studies.

▪ **Biochemist:** Biochemists study the chemical and physical principles of living things and biological processes. Within the agricultural sector, bio-

Agronomists work with crops and soil management and may work as analysts, environmentalists or forecasters.

chemists will contribute to the development of agricultural products, including those that will serve a medicinal function. Biochemistry, chemistry, biology, calculus, and physics will be part of students' coursework as they pursue degrees that prepare them for a career as a biochemist.

▪ **Climatologist:** Climatologists will figure prominently in the agricultural sector as the effects of climate change manifest themselves more readily over the next several decades. Climatologists study climate change, variability and the biosphere. Climatologists offer insight about the effects of climate change on the growth and development of agricultural products, including fruits, grains and vegetables. The natural sciences feature prominently in climatologists' educations, and students also will study meteorology as part of their coursework.

▪ **Food scientist:** Food scientists study chemistry, biochemistry, microbiology, and engineering so they can assist in the development of new food products. Food scientists may manage processing plants and some serve as researchers in an effort to solve problems related to food production.

▪ **Plant pathologist:** Plant pathologists specialize in analyzing issues re-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The agricultural sector employs millions of people across the globe.

lated to plant diseases. Research features prominently in plant pathologists' work, and many work in university settings. Some plant pathologists work for companies attempting to develop pest-resistant plants. Advanced degrees are necessary to work as a plant pathologist, and students will study mycology, bacteriology, virology, and physiology, among other subjects, as they pursue their degrees.

The agricultural sector employs millions of people across the globe. Many of those people do interesting work as they attempt to address issues facing the agricultural sector.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Food scientists may manage processing plants and some serve as researchers in an effort to solve problems related to food production.

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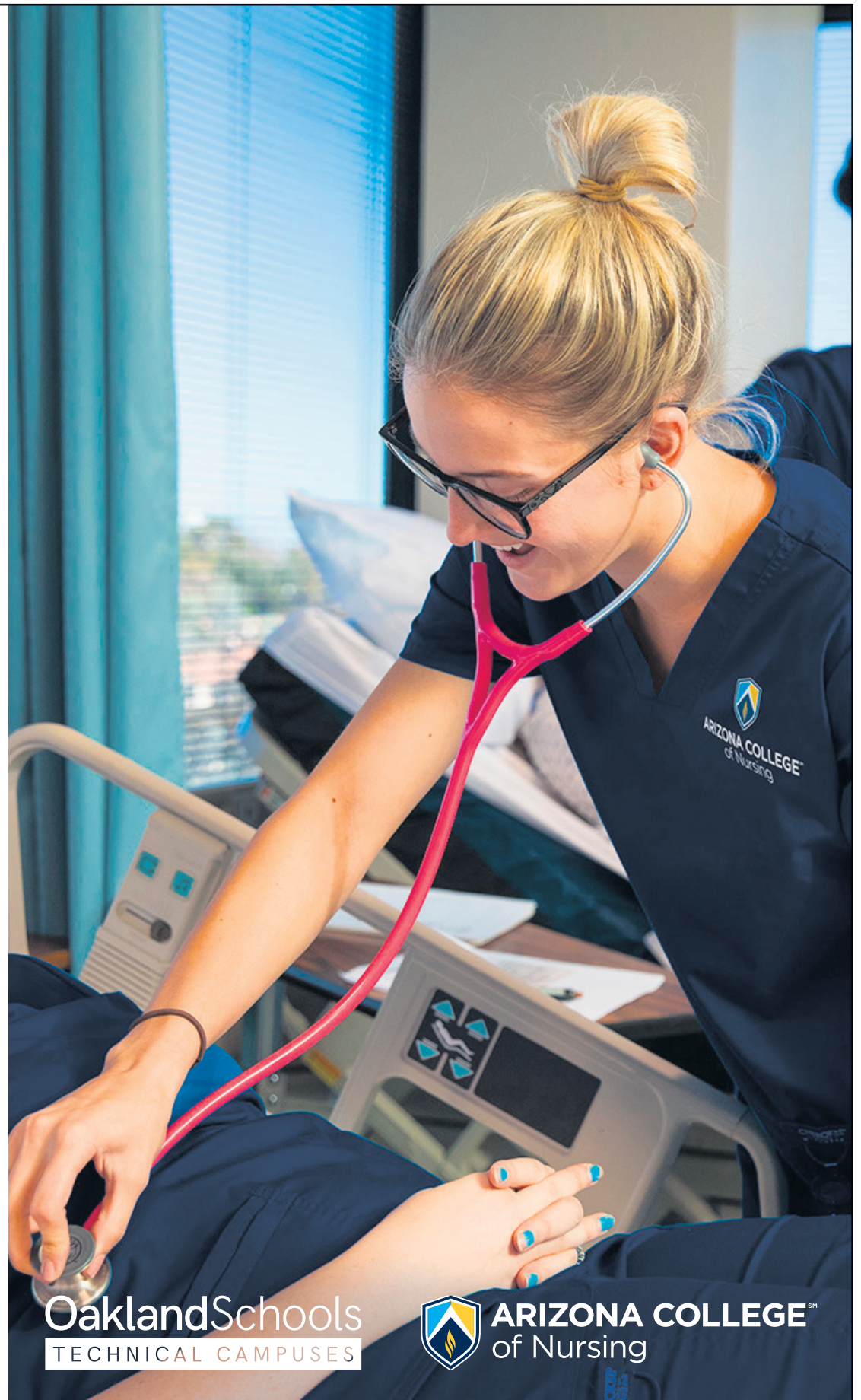


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STUDY STRATEGIES

How to help kids with math

Many parents recall struggling with math at one point or another in their academic careers. According to PBS, little is known about the neurobiological or environmental causes of math disabilities. Many experts attribute them to various deficits in a handful of skill types, including difficulties connecting the relationship between numbers and the quantities they represent and an incomplete understanding of the language of math.

Determining what's behind a student's struggles with math may require a collective effort on the part of parents and educators. Parents also may need to make a concerted effort to help their children with math at home, and they can approach that in various ways.

ious ways.

- Learn the ways modern teachers teach math. It may not take long before parents recognize that math is now taught differently than it likely was when they were still students. Beginning in 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative attempted to teach math in a new way. Parents of students who are struggling with math can contact their children's teachers to learn the methods they're using in the classroom. Ask for pointers on presenting the material at home and do your best to grasp the new approach.

- Utilize kids' interests to relay mathematical concepts. Kids may find material more relatable and easier to understand if parents incorporate their interests

into lessons. For example, parents can use sports to reinforce concepts kids are being taught in the classroom. If a child's favorite football team is winning by 21 points, parents can ask children to determine how many touchdowns the opponent will need to score to tie the game. Young readers can be given books that help children build fundamental math skills like counting, addition and subtraction. Incorporating kids' hobbies into home math lessons is a great way to build their enthusiasm for math.

- Speak with teachers. Ask teachers for their advice on relating concepts at home. Teachers may be limited in regard to how they can teach math in the classroom, but they might



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Parents can try various strategies to help their kids grasp mathematical concepts more fully.

be able to offer some tips to make materials more relatable at home.

- Work with a tutor. Parents who are struggling to grasp the new ways math is taught can easily become frustrated, and that frustration could rub off on kids. Before things reach

that point, parents can reach out to tutors. Some schools provide tutoring programs, while others may recommend local tutors. Fellow parents also can be great resources and may be able to recommend tutors who have produced successful results for their

children in the past.

Struggles with math are not uncommon. Parents can try various strategies to help their kids grasp mathematical concepts more fully.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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MUSIC EDUCATION

Important ways music education benefits students

Researchers increasingly are finding that “do-re-mi” may be just as essential to children’s development as “A-B-C.” Music education, which was once required in the classroom, is increasingly absent from school curriculums. However, proponents feel there should be a greater push for musical education as part of school curricula because of the many benefits students reap from music education.

Taps into multiple skill sets

Music participation goes beyond playing an instrument or singing notes from a page. Experts at Music Together, an early childhood music development program, say that participating in music education involves many different skills, including listening, vision, fine motor skills, problem solving, and utilizing large and small muscle groups.

Transformative effects

A growing body of research points to music for its transformative effects on youngsters. Participation in music education may help improve communication skills, foster better memory and help children focus their attention more effectively, according to the instrument retailer Zing Instruments. Music may provide the common ground to unite children in pursuit of a common goal.

Improves language skills

Neurobiologist Dr. Nina Kraus participated in “The Harmony Project,” which involved a series of experiments among second and third graders. Dr. Kraus discovered conclusively that music enhanced sound processing and cog-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Music education plays an important role in childhood development and acquisition of skills in and out of the classroom.

nitive skills (memory and attention). Music helps students develop the left side of the brain, which is known for processing language. A 2014 study by Arete Music Academy found children who study music tend to have larger vocabularies and more advanced reading skills than those who do not participate in music education.

More consistent attendance rates

The National Association for Music Education deter-

mined that schools that offer music education have better attendance rates (93.3%) than those that don’t (84.9%).

Higher grades

A study in The Journal for Research in Music Education found that students who participated in excellent music programs scored higher on tests in mathematics and English/language than students enrolled in lower-quality music programs or none at all. Researchers concluded there is a correla-

tion between music education and better retention of material.

Support from parents and teachers

Both educators and parents strongly believe that music education has a positive impact on overall academic performance, indicates NAMM Foundation and Grunwald Associates LLC. They also feel that budget cuts in music education or deficits in supplies and insufficient allocation

GREAT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOR BEGINNERS

Playing a musical instrument benefits people of all ages, including children. Young children may take to music education more readily than adults, acquiring skills in record time. While many instruments are beneficial to kids, certain choices are best for children just starting out.

Piano

The piano is a great instrument to learn because it enhances fine motor skills and often serves as a foundation for music education. The good news is one doesn’t have to purchase a piano to get started. Digital keyboards and even online piano keyboards can replicate piano sounds quite well and provide an inexpensive way to learn piano.

Ukulele

Ukuleles are affordable and their small size makes them ideal for kids. It’s easy to learn a few chords and play familiar songs. Plus, parents may appreciate that the ukulele is a relatively quiet instrument.

Recorder

A recorder often is one of the first instruments introduced to children in music classrooms. A recorder is an ideal introductory wind instrument because it is easier to play than a flute or clarinet. Nonetheless, it still requires students to learn coordination and breathing techniques.

Drums

Drums teach children rhythm, which is an essential component of all music. Drums are attractive to kids because they can be great fun to play and help reduce stress by getting out all that nervous energy. Electronic drum kits are available as quieter alternatives and are great options when space for a regular drum set is unavailable.

As children acquire skills on these instruments, they can continue or move on to more complicated alternatives.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

of resources is detrimental to students.

Increased IQ scores

An experiment published in a 2004 issue of Psychological Science conducted by E. Glenn Schellenberg at The University of Toronto at Mississauga found that, over the course of nine months, six-year-old participants who were given piano and voice lessons

tested on average three IQ points higher than those who had drama lessons only or no lessons at all.

Music education plays an important role in the lives of students, paying dividends that might surprise even those devoted to ensuring school curriculums include it.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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COLLEGE PREP

U.S. colleges are rethinking standardized tests

By Janet Lorin
Bloomberg

The pandemic forced a pause on colleges requiring standardized testing, long the gold standard for admissions in the U.S. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, widespread mandatory reliance on the ACT and SAT entrance exams isn't springing back as quickly. One reason is that schools anticipate more COVID disruptions and want to provide predictability to applicants. Another is concern over large race-related gaps in SAT scores, which have been blamed for unequal educational opportunity for people of color.

1. What are the SAT and ACT?

The SAT, administered by the New York-based College Board, and the Iowa City-based ACT are decades-old screening tools for U.S. college admission. Both are multiple-choice, written exams heavy on math and reading, taken by high school students typically in their junior year, sometimes senior. The SAT was invented in the 1920s. Harvard University, in the early 1930s, was the first school to use the SAT as an instrument in admissions decisions, initially to determine recipients of one small scholarship program, according to Nicholas Lemann, author of "The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy." The College Board, an association of educational institutions, adopted the SAT to replace a battery of essay tests during World War II, a change billed as temporary that instead proved lasting, Lemann said. College Board membership expanded greatly after the war, and the SAT became a

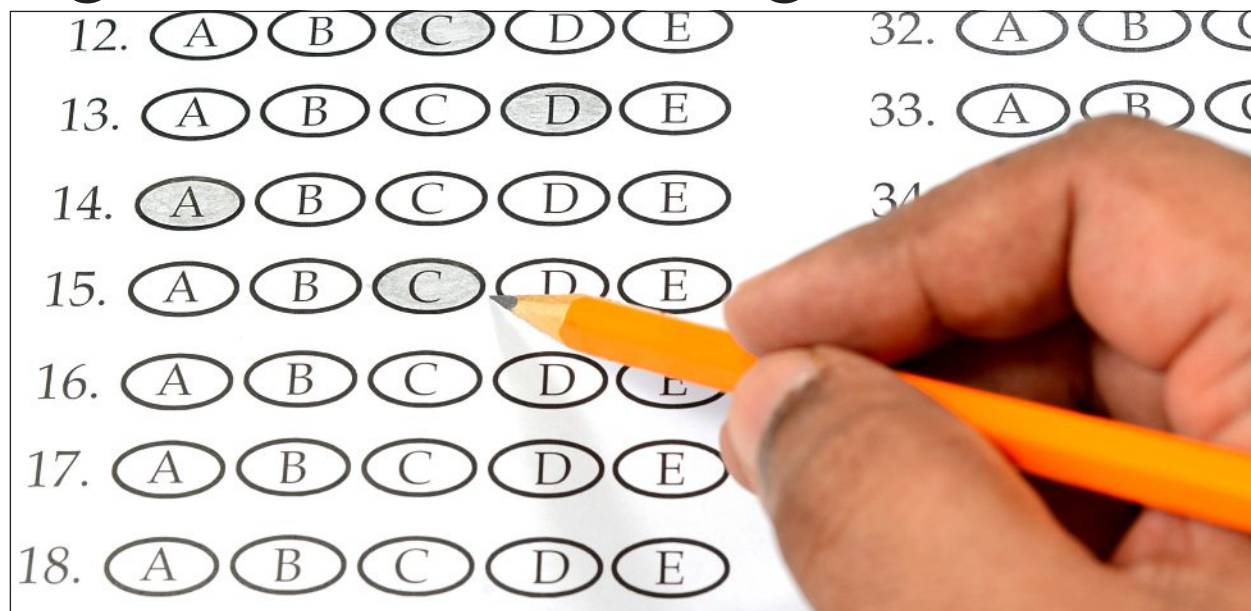


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The SAT and ACT are multiple-choice, written exams heavy on math and reading, taken by high school students typically in their junior year, sometimes senior.

mass-administered exam. The ACT emerged in the late 1950s as a competitor.

2. How important are they?

In a 2018 survey by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, nearly half of colleges said they gave "considerable importance" to ACT and SAT test scores in deciding which applicants to accept, down from 60% in 2004. The scores are also considered for scholarships, an important means of tuition support for many students. Some large public systems such as the University of Georgia and the University of Florida still require them. "A high score on the SAT or ACT will not compensate for a non-competitive" grade point average in high school, the University of Georgia says on its website. "Your record of three to three-and-a-half years' worth of rigorous academic work in the classroom will be the primary focus of any

admission decision."

3. Who has moved away from the tests?

The Common Application, the nonprofit behind the standardized application form, said only 5% of about 850 member schools are requesting scores in 2021-2022, compared to 55% in 2019. The University of Chicago and Brandeis University were among schools that had stopped requiring testing before Covid-19. The pandemic, by forcing the cancellation of most in-person testing, accelerated the reconsideration of standardized tests. All eight Ivy League schools have made them optional for current high school juniors. Harvard has suspended it for students as young as current 8th graders, and Cornell, for some of its undergraduate schools, won't even accept scores. The University of California system abolished testing requirements. "Test-optional admission is

the new normal," said Bob Schaeffer, interim executive director of FairTest, a nonprofit that has led the "test-optional" movement for 30 years. "These schools aren't going to go back even if they want to in most cases." The College Board in 2021 also eliminated the essay section from the SAT.

4. Who's still taking the tests and sending scores?

Even though many colleges aren't mandating scores, at least one group of students are still sending them: wealthier ones. In the current application cycle for current high school seniors, 52% of students in the wealthiest households submitted scores this school year, according to data from the Common Application through February. Only 39% of the poorest did so. Applications among first-generation students — those whose parents didn't receive bachelor's degrees

— grew by 21% from two years prior. Only 37% of underrepresented minorities sent scores in 2021-22, compared to 52% of non-underrepresented minorities. It's not clear how schools are evaluating students without testing.

5. What's the concern about racial disparities in testing?

"The use of standardized tests to measure aptitude and intelligence is one of the most effective racist policies ever devised to degrade Black minds and legally exclude Black bodies," Ibram Kendi wrote in his bestselling book, "How to Be an Antiracist." In the most recent report for the class of 2021, the mean score was 1,112 for White students and 934 for Black students. (The overall mean score was 1,060. A perfect score is 1,600.)

6. What explains the disparity in scores?

A variety of factors, ac-

ording to experts. For one thing, wealthier families can afford to send their high schoolers to test-prep courses that teach strategies for excelling on written exams. Wealth also influences the quality of schooling a given child receives. William Spriggs, an economist at Howard University in Washington, D.C., says Black students "are less likely to be in schools where there are advanced math courses," such as calculus. Priscilla Rodriguez, a vice president at the College Board, said the SAT is not a racist instrument. "Every question is rigorously reviewed for evidence of bias and any question that could favor one group over another is discarded," she said. "Further, changes made to the test over its 100-year history have removed all vestiges of an aptitude or 'IQ' test."

7. What alternatives are there?

Bowdoin College, which led the way by making admission tests optional starting in 1969, considers what courses were available at an applicant's high school, whether the student chose the most or least challenging and how the person performed relative to peers. James Nondorf, vice president for enrollment at the University of Chicago, said students can show their strengths in competitions such as chess, debate or math. (About 68% of applicants to Chicago chose to apply with test scores this year, down from 75% in 2021.) "I love entrepreneurship competitions, hack-a-thons, coding competitions," Nondorf said. "In some ways it's better than testing. It showcases a particular skill as opposed to testing, where you're seeing a whole set of things measured."

COLLEGE PREP

Guide to preparing for college admissions

Junior year is a pivotal time in the lives of high school students. Junior year marks a transition to upper classmen, and students begin to ponder their post-high school academic careers around this time as well. The college preparatory process can seem daunting, particularly if a student does not have a sibling who recently went through the steps and can offer advice. Well-meaning parents may want to share their own experiences, but much has changed since parents were looking ahead to their own college experiences. That doesn't mean parents can't offer important assistance, particularly when they learn the ropes of today's college preparatory process.

Speak with a guidance counselor to plan courses

Parents and students can meet collectively with a guidance counselor to talk about goals and coursework. Many high schools offer Advanced Placement classes or dual enrollment courses that enable students to earn college credit.

Discuss extracurricular activities

Colleges and universities do not just look at grade and test scores; they consider the entire applicant. Therefore, high schoolers should dabble in various clubs, organizations and sports to make them more appealing to admissions departments.

Enroll in a test preparation course

Though a growing number of American colleges

and universities have abandoned ACT and SAT scores as part of their admissions process, many schools still require those scores. Students can benefit from taking test prep classes either in school or through outside tutoring businesses. Learning strategies for the tests as well as seeing sample questions can remove some of the anxiety associated with the tests.

Visit schools and attend college fairs

Parents and students should make appointments to visit several college campuses that offer courses students are interested in. Getting one's name in admissions departments' databases also opens up students to emails about upcoming events and application deadlines.

Learn about The Common Application

The Princeton Review says most schools will use The Common Application as part of the admissions process. This enables students to enter all of their information and apply to multiple schools using the same account. However, schools will typically have different supplemental essay topics or test score requirements. Essays typically are required to be around 650 words.

Get financial paperwork in order

Applying to college and applying for financial aid (which every student should do regardless of income) are two separate processes. In the United States, students will start with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The FAFSA will



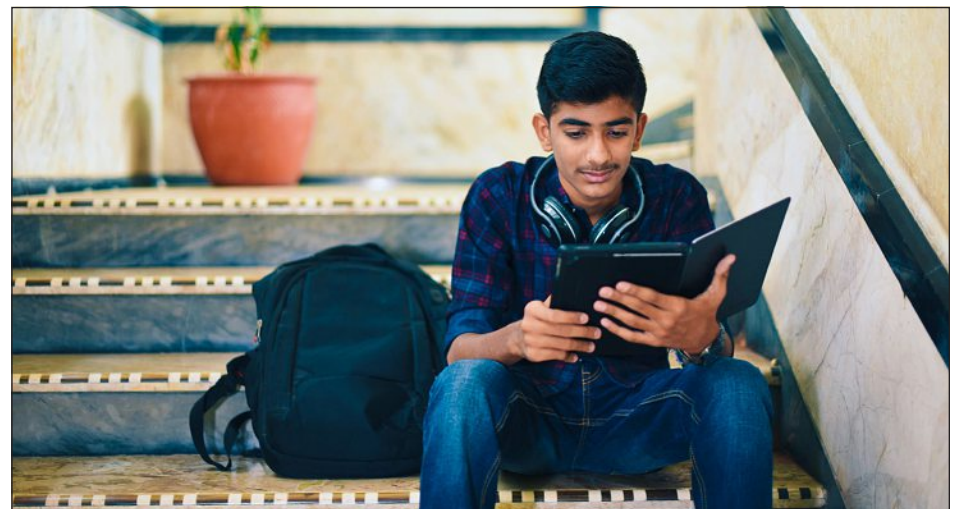
PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The road to college may seem confusing, but a few simple strategies can make it easier to navigate.

help determine eligibility for grants, scholarships, federal work-study, and student loans. The FAFSA requires information taken from federal income tax statements. Parents can help guide their students further by following up on school transcripts, teacher recommendations and providing application cost fees, which vary from \$50 to \$100 per school.

The road to college may seem confusing, but a few simple strategies can make it easier to navigate.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Applying to college and applying for financial aid (which every student should do regardless of income) are two separate processes.

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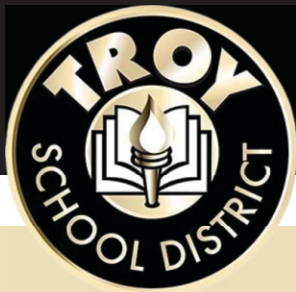
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