

The Flawed Test

- Alex Kerai

“The average (arithmetic mean) of 4 different integers is 75. If the largest integer is 90, what is the least possible value of the smallest integer?” Imagine answering a question like this at 9:00 on a Saturday morning under a time limit with about 25 more questions to answer after it. Would you be able to? After a long week of school, staying up late to finish homework, and then stressing out over the SAT, students should not have to wake up early on a Saturday to take a test that could decide their future. Who thought this up anyway? Who thought it was a good idea to test high school juniors on their academic prowess after twelve years of schooling by asking them to get up early and take a 3.5 hour test which ends up being 4.5 hours with all the breaks and directions being read? Doesn't anyone know that teenagers need to sleep? Future plans hang in the balance of this 7:45 a.m. test! Is this really what it all boils down to? Verbal, writing, and math; three scores which hold the keys to the kingdom for me; three scores which can make me or break me. That's what happens when you become a junior in high school. You become your score. But is that how it should be?

Two months ago, in early March, the College Board made news because it finally acknowledged that standardized tests have become, according to College Board President and CEO David Coleman, “far too disconnected from the work of our high schools.” Then came the new revised model for the SAT which abolishes the penalty for wrong answers, focuses more on words that students will encounter in life (unlike ‘anathema’ for instance), and “math that matters most.” Coleman also acknowledged that standardized tests are “too stressful for students, too filled with mystery and “tricks” to raise scores and aren't necessarily creating more collegeready students.” It's a step in the right direction with the College Board at least recognizing that the SAT is flawed, but with the new test slated to debut in Spring 2016, is it too late for these changes to make a difference in the college admissions process?

As a student who just took the SAT and spent many months preparing for it, I agree with Coleman and the College Board's new plan for the SAT, and I hope that it will change the course of standardized testing for good, but I believe it is too late. Thousands of students have already taken the SAT as it is and have had to suffer through four hours of testing that could determine their future. To these students, their entire life hinges on the 103 questions and one essay that make up their score. These standardized tests put too much stress on students who believe that without test scores they will not get to into a good college and get a good job. The College Board is still ignoring the problem that standardized tests do not accurately portray a student's academic potential. Having students come to a testing center at 7:45 in the morning is a terrible idea for high school students who need their sleep. Instead of changing the format of the test, the College Board should instead consider shifting the start time to later in the morning (as was proposed for high school start times in the 1990s) and altering the length of the test. I hope to see more changes made to the SAT soon; my only regret is that they were made too late and students today will not be able to benefit from them.

(By the way, the answer to the SAT question above is 33.)