

Information about SAT and ACT test preparation for PCS 11th Graders

A few introductory comments:

Don't start test prep too early: in most cases, the fall/winter of junior year is the right time in order to plan for tests to be taken in May or June of junior year (that is when most college admission testing begins). Besides, the students may not have even learned all of the math skills and English skills at the level they will be tested on if they attempt to take the test too early.

Beware of test burn-out, which typically happens when a child begins prep and/or official testing too early in high school. The goal is for the student to peak (i.e. be able to earn their best-possible scores) either by the end of junior year or beginning of senior year. It is rare for a student to be able to peak early in the junior year (or before), so it is counterproductive to start the testing calendar for the student too soon, and can even lead to declining scores later on.

Do not overemphasize these tests. The most important part of a college application will always be the PCS transcript, never the test scores. While scores play a role, a student's record over their years of high school matter most in college admissions decisions.

Make a plan, and be efficient with time spent on test prep: you want your student to spend the time on test prep that is needed to do his/her best, but not a second more than that.

Starting test prep earlier rarely results in the kids ending their whole process earlier. So, in the end, all you've done is dragged the process out longer than it needed to be.

Now that we've made those comments,

PCS students who are college bound will become interested at some point during the second semester of 11th grade or beginning of 12th grade in taking the SAT or the ACT. Those tests might be used as an admissions requirement for U.S. colleges or universities.

No college in the U.S. cares which of those two tests a student takes. It is totally up to the student to decide. Colleges view them equally.

Once the Covid-19 pandemic began, over 90% of the colleges in the U.S. shifted to make these tests optional. Keep checking in with the PCS college advisor or on the colleges' admissions websites because it may turn out that the colleges will decide that the tests will be permanently optional. That seems to be the trend as we move through 2022 and toward 2023.

Ideally a student will take this test at the end of 11th grade or the beginning of 12th grade (from May, 2022 until December, 2022). That is perfect timing for a college application.

Some students take the test one time, and then decide to take it again to see if they can get a better score. That's fine! Taking it a third time, however, starts to get a little obsessive.

There are a lot of ways to prepare for these tests. In fact, just being in school is the best preparation of all! Beyond that, there are many free resources available to help you study and practice for taking this test.

First, let's go over the two tests' formats:

Structure and Timing	SAT	ACT
Testing time	3 hours + 50-minute essay (optional)	2 hours 55 minutes + 40-minute essay (optional)
Structure	3 tests + optional essay	4 tests + optional writing test
Number of questions	154	215
Score range	Composite 400–1600 Essay reported in 3 dimensions, each 2–8)	Composite 1–36 (writing scores: 2–12)
Test components	<p>Reading Test 65 minutes 52 questions</p> <p>Writing and Language Test 35 minutes 44 questions</p> <p>Math Test 80 minutes 58 questions</p>	<p>Reading Test 35 minutes 40 questions</p> <p>English Test 45 minutes 75 questions</p> <p>Math Test 60 minutes 60 questions</p> <p>Science Test 35 minutes 40 questions</p>

So, how can you decide which of these two tests to take?

One way to figure out which of these tests to take is by remembering back to when you took the PSAT and/or Practice ACT. Did either one feel more “right” for you than the other?

Another way would be to sign yourself up on both companies’ websites and try their free, on-line practice tests. Then we can compare your experiences taking them and your scores and see which one seems to have gone better for you.

Finally, you may just want to go and actually take both tests. Get your score on each one of them. Choose which score is better, and that will be the one you send to a college. You do not have to send the other score to any college if you don’t want to. So there is no risk.

Once you decide which test to take, how can you do some test prep for it ahead of time?

1) Both test companies offer you free test prep services. For the SAT, it is Khan Academy. Go to www.khanacademy.org/sat and begin. One of the great features of the Khan Academy is that it can sense the areas of the SAT you seem to be having a little trouble with and it can give you extra tutorials and extra practice in just those areas. For the ACT, go to: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/free-act-test-prep.html> We recommend that you do these prep programs because they are free and because they are most aligned with what you’ll see on test day.

2) If that is not enough test prep for you, then go to the PCS College Office in Room 701. I have a lot of free SAT and ACT practice books that you can use. They are published by The Princeton Review, Kaplan, and Barron’s.

3) If that is *still* not enough test prep for you, then PCS teams up every year with SAB to offer a test prep course. We hire a tutor and have a course that is comprised of four practice tests and seven class sessions. The classes meet from February through April of 11th grade so that you will be able to take the test in May, 2022.

4) Finally, some kids ultimately hire private tutors but these can be quite costly, and we cannot guarantee the quality or the style of any tutor or tutoring service.

To Prepare for the ACT: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html>

To Prepare for the SAT: https://learn.khanacademy.org/osp-landing-page/?utm_source=ospxtnl-sy-2021-22&utm_medium=cb418-xt&utm_campaign=osp-lp

Once you’ve decided which test to take and you’re buzzing along in your test prep, the time will come for you to register for the actual test. The students need to be the ones who do the registering, *not their parents!* If any student needs help registering for an SAT or ACT, then I will be happy to help them do that, or a parent can help them, but the parents should never do it in the place of a student. The students will need to make their own user IDs and passwords and put them in a safe, accessible place like their cellphone. The registration questionnaires from both companies usually take about 45 minutes for a teenager to complete.

Below are the dates that the tests are offered in 2022. You can choose a date to take it and then see if you want to do a retake on a second date. One common practice here at PCS is to take the test once in the spring, see your score, and then decide if you want to take it again at the end of the summer or in the early fall.

ACT: June 11, July 16, September 10, October 22, December 10

SAT: May 7, June 4, August 27, October 1, November 5, December 3

Here are some popular test-related “rules of thumb:”

These tests are NEVER as important as the regular schoolwork at PCS. They are usually third or fourth on the list of importance. So do not obsess about them.

Kids should register for their own tests. They should make up their own user names and passwords and should keep them in a safe place so that they can use them to gain access to their accounts from their home computers as well as the school computers.

Kids should do all the free practice opportunities first before deciding what, if any, additional test prep they feel they need.

Kids should not report their scores to any colleges right away. The current practice is to wait until all of your testing is done, see which scores turned out best, and then send only those best scores to a college. Some colleges do “super-scoring” and that is based your making a careful selection of which score sets you want to send them.

Fewer and fewer colleges are even requiring these tests. The number of colleges that are going “test score optional” goes up every year in the U.S.