

Statement on the Vote by the College Board Trustees to Revise the SAT I

June 2002

I am delighted by the College Board's decision to alter the SAT I examination. It marks a major event in the history of standardized testing. I give enormous credit to the College Board and to its president, Gaston Caperton, for the vision they have demonstrated in bringing forward these changes and for their genuine commitment to improved educational attainment in our nation. By their action today, they have laid the foundation for a new test that will better serve our students and schools.

Standardized tests perform a necessary function in American education, providing a common measure of student performance in an educational system marked by vast disparities between schools. But we need standardized tests that bear a demonstrable relationship to what students actually study in the high school college-preparatory curriculum. We also need to focus student attention on mastery of subject matter rather than mastery of test-taking skills.

The new College Board test will do an excellent job of fulfilling these goals. It will draw on state and national curriculum surveys to establish a clear link between what students are taught in school and what they are tested on for college admission. It will ask students to express their thinking in writing—a critical skill for success in college and beyond—and will focus attention on the teaching of writing in the K-12 schools. It will cover a greater portion of the mathematics curriculum that college-bound students are expected to master. And it has the potential to offer students, parents, and schools more useful feedback about each student's preparation for college-level work.

Some will argue that the improvements adopted by the College Board today do not go far enough. I believe, however, that the College Board has taken the appropriate steps with these reforms. They encourage students to take challenging courses in high school, knowing that their efforts will be reflected in their test scores. In addition, the new test will reinforce K-12 improvement efforts designed to establish clear curricular expectations, set high academic standards, and use standardized tests to assess performance relative to those standards.

At the University of California, the Academic Senate has asked its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) to continue its collaborative work with both the College Board and ACT, Inc., on the development of admissions tests that reflect the specifications outlined by BOARS earlier this year. That work will continue over the coming months. I thank the Academic Senate for the contribution it has made to the national testing discussion and look forward to our continuing dialogue with both the College Board and ACT.