

College Entrance Exams

Many ELP students and/or their parents are ready to discuss ACT/SAT testing sooner than the school presentation occurs in the junior year. If interested in learning more about these standardized tests, including dates of administration, costs and preparation materials, you may want to explore the following websites.

ACT materials: <http://www.act.org/>

PSAT and SAT information: <https://www.collegeboard.org/>

It is not uncommon for ELP students in grades 8-10 to take the ACT and/or the SAT for a baseline score. The ELP staff suggests students complete their first ACT and/or SAT without any advance preparation. This allows a student to identify areas of relative strength and weakness, and to more efficiently prepare for the test in the junior year.

The PSAT is a pre-SAT exam taken in October of the junior year and offers entrance into the National Merit Scholarship Program for those scoring in the top 1-2%. The ELP staff suggests targeted preparation for this exam, as students may only report the score from this single opportunity to compete for National Merit.

ELP staff are often asked what constitutes a "good score" on the ACT or SAT. There is no solid answer for that question. Many college scholarships have a minimum score, which is usually in the high 20s or low 30s on the ACT. Comparable SAT scores would range from around 1250 around 1400. However, most college entrance and scholarship requirements are a combination of ACT/SAT, GPA, class rank and high school coursework, so those with lower assessment scores can compensate with higher values in other areas.

Another common question is whether a student should complete the entrance exam "with writing" or "without writing". Some universities and colleges require the "with writing" score, so there is an advantage to completing the "writing" version of the exam.

Most colleges will accept either an ACT or SAT score, so there may not be a need to take both assessments. It used to be common that Midwestern schools wanted ACT and the SAT was preferred on the coasts and in the south, but many colleges have changed their policies. Utilize the university/college websites for more information about policies from particular institutions.

An additional note regarding standardized testing

Remember that the norms for the ACT and SAT are for college-bound juniors and seniors. Most younger students will not have completed the entire range of

coursework juniors and seniors have, so students and parents should be prepared for a lower score than on past standardized exams. Most other assessments compare students to age mates.

Example: an 8th grader scoring 99% on Iowa Assessments may only score 75% on an ACT. This is normal, since the student is being compared to those 3 or 4 years older, and the 8th grader probably hasn't taken Trigonometry or Chemistry yet.

A student's score may increase the second time he/she takes the ACT/SAT, simply because of experiencing more coursework. Also, some students see a small increase in score the second time due to being more familiar with the assessment. Familiarity may lead to increased scores or decreased scores, depending upon a student's anxiety level. Talk with your student and make informed decisions about whether to test early or often.