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Answer Sheet

Finally, the College Board makes it easier for students with disabilities to get SAT accommodations

By Valerie Strauss December 2

For many years, students with disabilities and their counselors often complained about how hard it is to win testing accommodations during the administration of the SAT, Advanced Placement and other standardized exams from the College Board. That's going to change, the organization said.

The College Board, which owns the SAT, just announced that starting Jan. 1, "the vast majority" of students who have special-education plans that already include accommodations for testing — such as extra time, sitting in a separate room, and/or having the test read to the student — will receive automatic approval for the same accommodations when taking the SAT, PSAT 10, PSAT/NMSQT, SAT subject tests and AP exams.

College counselors expressed delight at the changes, with some noting that they will especially help students who do not have the resources to fight the College Board for accommodations. In the past, winning accommodations for the SAT was often a timely and laborious process requiring extensive documentation of a disability.

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Early this year, as more states began to adopt the SAT or the ACT as a required test for high school students to take, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division began to look into complaints that the testing organizations were too stingy with accommodations to eligible students, Education Week reported.

In a new statement, David Coleman, president and chief executive of the College Board, said: "Educators, students, and families have asked us to simplify our process, and we've listened. The school staff knows their students best, and we want to cut down on the time and paperwork needed to submit a testing accommodations request."

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Changes are also being made to providing testing supports to English as a Second Language students. The statement said that starting Jan. 1, "ELL students taking a state-funded SAT during the school day will have access to testing instructions in several native languages and approved word-to-word bilingual glossaries." Next fall, they can also receive extended testing time (up to time and a half) and the opportunity to test in an environment with reduced distractions, it said.

Private-school students with the kinds of specific plans given to students with disabilities by public schools can use a "current, formal school-based plan" to seek identical accommodations.

It seems worth noting that the College Board used the occasion of announcing its new policy to take a dig at its competitor, the ACT. The statement said:

These changes build on the College Board's recent work to level the playing field for students, including offering students 43% more time per question on the SAT than on the ACT and giving all students access to free, personalized Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy so they can feel confident and prepared on test day.

The SAT long reigned as the leading college admissions exam — at least until 2012, when enrollment for the ACT outpaced it for the first time. The ACT has remained No. 1 since then, and the SAT has been redesigned to look more like the ACT, seen as a more consumer-friendly exam linked more to school curriculums.