

# THE Center for Education Reform



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 204 Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

## Back-to-School Alert 3<sup>rd</sup> in a series from CER

### A CLOSE LOOK AT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT *SAT and NAEP scores reflect minimal progress*

(Washington, DC, 8/30/00) US achievement remains steady at unacceptable levels of progress, according to analysis of both the latest SAT scores and the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Both indicators help policymakers and the public better understand the depths of student learning. However, the SAT's myriad changes over the last several years have made it a less effective barometer of what college-bound kids know.

Blazing on network news, the College Board – sponsor of the SATs – boasted that SAT math scores hit a “30 year high... reflecting strong gains for American Education.” Not so coincidentally, in 1996, the College Board said the SATs were at a record high in 25 years. Not said is that the kids who've taken the test over the last five years ARE TAKING A DIFFERENT TEST!

#### The Facts About the SATs:

- *The tests have changed dramatically.* The math test as of 1995 allows students to use calculators and gives them an additional 30 minutes. In 1999 it was reported that questions with alleged bias were purged, including math questions upon which the College Board found that some groups (i.e. minorities, woman, etc) performed more poorly.

Despite additional changes to the verbal section, verbal SAT scores remain constant at the recentered 2000 score of 505. Beginning in 1995, the students taking the SAT saw fewer questions, longer reading passages, and no antonym section. Tutoring firms say the “new” SAT is more coachable.

- *Highest Scorers Losing Ground.* The largest decline over the last two decades continues to be among top scoring students. In 1990, 4 percent of students reported grade averages of A+ and averaged 622 on verbal and 631 on math. This year, 7 percent report A+ averages and their SAT scores dropped to 610 and 628 for verbal and math, respectively. Over the twenty years from '75-95, the number of college bound students who scored above 600 on the verbal test slipped 36%.

- *Minorities Gain Ground But Only Slightly:* The scores of African-Americans and Hispanics, for example, increased 6 points and two points, respectively, in ten years in verbal, and similar gains in math. African-Americans still trail whites by 104 in math and 94 in verbal.

The NAEP scores magnify these trends, but this year's report makes comparisons to previous proficiency scores almost impossible. It's not clear why, and we'll be studying it closely over the days to come, but for now, it's clear that students are still at significantly lower levels of achievement than the reports may indicate:

For example, nine-year old reading scores haven't improved since 1980. In math, 17 year olds saw a slight increase in scores, and gradually 13 year olds have marked a six-point increase, but in both reading and math, the black-white achievement gap has widened, despite reports that blacks are taking more advanced courses. In science, there was a slight dip for high school seniors and nine-year olds.

Across the board, while more attentions being paid to education, and pressure is mounting on the existing system to improve, more coursework and better grades aren't translating into better results.

More data and past years' analysis of these achievement trends can be found at CER's website at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com). Just hit the ***Back to School*** button!

(Next ***Back to School*** report: A look at the reasons beyond why we are making marginal progress, and how, contrary to the Rand report, real structural reforms factor into progress for many children.)

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*The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).*