



SCORING PROBLEMS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE SAT

March 29, 2006

The College Board has apologized to high school students and college admissions offices for mistakes that resulted in over 5,000 incorrect scores on the October 2005 SAT.

Of the 495,000 college entrance tests taken in October, 4,411 were scored too low and around 600 were scored too high.

The College Board, which runs the SAT, notified colleges, high school guidance counselors and students of corrections for lower scores. Higher scores were not changed.

“We couldn’t be more sorry for the total stress this has caused students and admissions officers, and families,” Chiara Coletti, a spokeswoman for the College Board, told the Associated Press.

Who scores the SAT?

The problems came to light after two students who took the October test questioned the scores they received in December. The College Board said the problems are the fault of the Pearson Educational Measurement, the company that scores most of the SAT exams.

The company said the scoring problems were due to technical issues, including excess moisture that caused the answer sheets to expand before they were scanned and scanners that did not pick up some lightly marked answers.

Additional incorrect scores were discovered after the company realized it had not fully re-scanned all the October tests for errors.

Officials at the College Board said new scoring safeguards will be added including scanning each answer sheet twice and improving moisture detecting software.

“We know we have to restore public confidence in the entire process because this anomaly occurred,” Coletti told the Los Angeles Times.

Changes not enough

Critics say the College Board is not being forthright about problems in the testing system.

“Everybody appears to be telling half-truths and that erodes confidence in the College Board,” Bruce Poch, vice president and dean of admissions at Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., told the New York Times.

Students, too, are upset by the scoring errors, including Beatrice Bradley, a senior at the Williams School in Connecticut, who said she found out that her writing section score should have been 700 instead of 690.

“You have to wonder how many things go unchecked,” Bradley told the New York Times.

Serious implications for students

College officials say they will try to make sure students are not negatively impacted.

SAT scores are less important than a student’s grades, extracurricular activities and other test scores, they say, but the real issue will be scholarships.

“With scholarships, some use flat cutoff points with the SAT score. They say if you score above 1,200 or 1,800 on the SAT, you are eligible for a scholarship. If you don’t get that score, you don’t get that scholarship,” Donald Heller, an associate professor of education at Penn State University and financial aid expert, told the New York Times.

What seem to be insignificant differences can have big implications for students.

“This would be a comedy of errors if the impact on human lives were not so tragic,” Robert Schaeffer of the group FairTest, which opposes excessive standardized testing, told the Associated Press.

One impacted student is Jake DeLillo, a star lacrosse player at Yorktown High School in New York, who said his lower-than-expected scores in October led him to reconsider his first choice schools. DeLillo’s scores were understated by 170 points.

“It was definitely upsetting,” he told the New York Times. “People make mistakes, but this was a big one.”

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

© 2006 MacNeil/Lehrer Productions