

Propelling College-Going in Maine

A Case Study on Using the SAT for Assessment, Placement, and Planning

Maine is advancing several bold ideas to help more students reach their college and career goals. Education leaders there are preparing public high school students for success in the state's two- and four-year colleges and universities to ensure that more students earn a college degree and are ready to meet Maine's workforce goal of 60 percent postsecondary credential attainment by 2025.¹ The partnership between K-12 and college leaders to prepare all students for postsecondary success is a model for other states.

As the nation's most rural state, about one-third of Maine's high school graduates attend one of seven community colleges, many hoping to transfer to a baccalaureate program. However, about 46 percent of students entering community college are placed in one or more remedial courses.² Students needing extensive remediation are at greater risk of dropping out of college altogether, with neither a certificate nor degree in hand.

In response, Maine's K-12 and higher education leaders and the College Board teamed up to better prepare high school students for the courses they will face in college. Here's how:

Statewide SAT Testing

In 2005, Maine was the first state to adopt the SAT as its junior-year, K-12 accountability assessment. Since that time the SAT has helped juniors understand the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college. Ten states and the District of Columbia now give the SAT during the school day at no cost to students.

Academic Check-Ups

Maine offers all students an "academic check-up" in their junior year to assess their readiness for college. Working in partnership with their K-12 colleagues, community college leaders used the SAT's "Skills Insights" to identify specific benchmarks in Math and English that students need to master to avoid remedial courses. Since the state already provides the SAT to all high school juniors—along with free Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy—Maine's education leaders can quickly identify students who are *not* prepared for college and help them strengthen skills in their senior year.

Using the SAT for Course Placement

Students enrolling directly in community college can use their SAT scores to enroll in first-year courses that best meet their academic needs. Community college students have diverse college and career intentions, so Maine's community college leaders set special benchmarks for students interested in STEM-related math or technical math, which may be more

Key Takeaways:

- **Administering the SAT to all juniors** leads to more students preparing for college including students who might not otherwise consider it.
- **Taking the SAT in their junior year of high school is an academic check-up, providing** students with critical insights regarding their readiness for college in time to overcome any academic weaknesses.
- **Course placement benchmarks for students entering community colleges** signal the knowledge and skills needed to enroll in credit-bearing courses.
- **SAT score-send campaigns** link a broad and deep population of high school students with colleges and universities.

appropriate for students interested in workforce certificates and degrees. Maine's educational innovators are leading the way in using the SAT to serve community college students who plan to transfer to a four-year institution or who are interested in workforce training.

"Send Your Score" Marketing Campaigns

Adding support to these educational innovations, Maine ensures that students' efforts on the SAT are fully recognized by the state's two- and four-year colleges and universities. The "Send Your Scores" campaign, initiated by the Maine Community College System in partnership with the Maine University System and the Maine Department of Education, encourages high school juniors taking the SAT to send their scores (for free) to at least one Maine public community college and one public four-year university.

The campaign has yielded tremendous results. In 2018 the University of Maine saw a 12-fold increase in the number of scores they received from students participating in the SAT School Day test administration.

Proving First Chances for All Students

Community colleges are often viewed as places where students can earn a second chance at educational success; a transformative commitment for which these institutions can be proud. Maine is providing first chances to "second chance" students by ensuring they are well prepared for college the moment they graduate from high school. Using the SAT and

free practice resources on Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy, Maine is preparing students for success in two- and four-year institutions throughout the state. The lessons learned in Maine—and the productive partnership among K-12 schools

¹ *Maine Community College System: Strategic Plan* (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2020), p. 9.

² Hurwitz, M., Smith, J., Niu, S., and Howell, J. (2015). “The Maine Question: How is \$-Year College Enrollment Affected by Mandatory

and two- and four-year colleges and universities—can serve as a blueprint for other states interested in driving educational reform.

College Entrance Exams.” *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol 37, No. 1 (138-159).