



WHY REPLACING MAINE'S 11TH-GRADE ASSESSMENT WITH THE SAT IS A GOOD IDEA—EVEN IF IT IS NOT A PERFECT SOLUTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following bullet points represent some of the main points put forth in *Why Replacing Maine's 11th-Grade Assessment with the SAT Is a Good Idea—Even If It Is Not a Perfect Solution*, a publication of the Great Maine Schools Project. If you would like a copy of the [complete article](http://www.greatmainschools.org) you can visit our Web site: www.greatmainschools.org. Under the Resources section, click Info Briefs.

- The MEA is not meaningful to students—**since it does not satisfy graduation requirements, students have no personal investment in the test, which raises the question of whether the test can accurately assess the performance of Maine adolescents**
- The SAT is a portable asset, while the MEA is not—**students will receive a score that can be used to apply to college or to place into college courses**
- Although some colleges no longer require the SAT for application purposes, SAT scores are nevertheless used to place students into credit-bearing college courses—**failure to achieve the SAT or other placement test cut-off score requires incoming college students to enroll in costly remedial courses that do not earn them credit toward graduation**
- Debates over the merits and value of assessment or placement testing aside, the reality is that our world is rapidly becoming ever more interconnected, and the SAT can help integrate Maine learning standards with the larger world—**our state is not a closed system, and the SAT is a nationally recognized gateway to college and an almost universally accepted measure of academic performance and potential**
- The MEA, like the SAT, has only a limited ability to measure academic achievement—**that is why Maine also has a local assessment system to evaluate performance indicators that will not be reflected in test results**
- Students will still take the MEA in 4th and 8th grades, just as they will still be required to satisfy local assessment standards—**the SAT will replace only one test among many**
- 75% of Maine students already take the SAT—**in an era of increased emphasis on high-stakes testing, it will be one less test that our students will have to take**

- Numerous Maine students already face far too many barriers (geographic isolation, financial hardship, no college-going tradition in their family, etc.) standing between them and a college degree, and every additional hurdle makes a college education that much more difficult to achieve—**one less test means one less obstacle for Maine students to overcome as they consider their future options, especially college**
- 85% of Maine students graduate from high school, 75% take the SAT, 53% will actually enroll, and only 30% will earn a bachelor’s degree—**these dwindling percentages reflect a disconnect between high school and college, one that can potentially be mitigated by making the SAT a statewide requirement for all students**
- Currently, SAT preparation services are costly and beyond the reach of many financially disadvantaged students—**when the SAT becomes subsidized by the state, not only will the state cover the cost of taking the test, it will also make SAT-preparation services available to *all* students at no direct cost to them or their families**
- Although some students may experience disappointment if they do not score well on the SAT, our public-education system should not be in the business of sheltering students from the inevitable challenges and setbacks of life—**the State must support programs and practices that better prepare students for life after high school, while also promoting greater awareness and opportunities**
- “An Act to Initiate Education Reform in Maine,” the original *Learning Results* legislation, states that the State Board of Education, the Maine Department of Education, and the school administrative units must all “explore a wide range of programs and options so that the standards adopted will reflect the highest possible expectations”—**today, the *highest possible expectations* must include, at the very least, some form of completed post-secondary education or training; in our knowledge-driven economy, college readiness and work readiness have become one in the same**
- Replacing the 11th-grade MEA with the SAT shows that the Department of Education is continuing to “explore a wide range of programs and options”—**this move is evidence that the DOE is actively working to place student interests above other concerns**
- The “Guiding Principles” of the Maine *Learning Results* mandate that students graduate high school as (1) clear and effective communicators, (2) self-directed and life-long learners, (3) creative and practical problem solvers, (4) responsible and involved citizens, (5) collaborative and quality workers, and (6) integrative and informed thinkers—**numbers 2, 4, and 5 are achieved through exposure to the kinds of holistic learning experiences that go well beyond academics and that can only be truly measured at the local level; but the remaining three principles are what the SAT was designed to measure**
- Maine has made great strides in increasing student access and academic expectations within its public-school system, and when the SAT becomes the 11th-grade assessment test Maine will not be abandoning or undermining this considerable progress—**to the contrary, Maine will be affirming and extending the good work already accomplished by the Legislature, the Maine Department of Education, the school administrative districts, and our many devoted educators; the SAT is *the logical next step* in Maine’s continuing efforts to improve its public-education system**
- Replacing the MEA will not be easy and unforeseen complications will almost certainly arise, but those same challenges and complications will still be there two years, five years, or ten years from now—**we can either make these tough decisions today, or we will be forced to make even tougher decisions later**



The MEA AND THE SAT: A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

	MEA	SAT
Time needed to administer	4+ school days	4 hours on a Saturday
Required for high school graduation	No	No
Recognition beyond Maine	No	Yes: the SAT is a nationally recognized achievement test
Required for college application	No	Yes: most institutions of higher education require the SAT, but not all
Required for college placement	No	Yes: in many cases, the SAT is used to establish a cut-off score for entry into credit-bearing college courses
Encourages increased post-secondary enrollments	No	Yes: a state-supported SAT score is one less obstacle standing between high school and college for many youth
Students are personally invested in the test	No	Yes: SAT scores can be used for college application and placement, and will likely enhance student motivation to do well on the test
Aligned with Maine's <i>Learning Results</i>	Yes: the MEA was designed to measure whether students are meeting Maine's learning standards	Yes: a recent review by the College Board showed a high degree of alignment with the MLR and the MEA
Students are specifically prepared in advance to take the test	Yes: LAS alignment and individual teacher coaching	Yes: high degree of MLR alignment and SAT-preparation services will be made available to all students
Meets NCLB reporting requirements	Yes	Yes
Direct costs for students/parents	None	None: the State will pay the testing fee (about \$40)
Long-term state costs	Test development and ongoing modification expenses; four days of teacher time; other ancillary costs	Testing fees; student transportation to and from testing center; other ancillary costs