



The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

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for immediate release, Wednesday, August 25, 2026

**OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
REMAIN ACT/SAT-OPTIONAL OR FREE FOR FALL 2027; IVY PLUS
INSTITUTIONS REINSTATING TESTING MISLEADINGLY DOMINATE MEDIA
NARRATIVE; DECADES OLD BODY OF EVIDENCE SUPPORTS POSITIVE
OUTCOMES WITH TEST OPTIONAL AND FREE ADMISSIONS**

Ninety percent of U.S. four-year colleges and universities will not require applicants for Fall 2027 admissions to submit ACT/SAT scores according to a [new tally by FairTest](#), the National Center for Fair & Open Testing. That's a total of over 2,000 of the nation's bachelor-degree granting institutions.

"Contrary to the national media and test-prep industry narrative, there has been no national return to required testing. Nearly 93% of confirmed institutions remain test optional or free," explained FairTest Executive Director Harry Feder. "The return to testing story is driven almost exclusively by the Ivy Plus institutions – a tiny sliver of American colleges – and the outsized coverage they receive from journalists and in outlets like the New York Times. Ivy Plus schools, as wealthy, exclusive national outliers, have increasingly gone back to requiring test scores for admission for their own institutional reasons and in response to external pressures. Their unique positions -- as private research institutions deeply impacted by federal actions and that receive applications from students in a very narrow high-GPA range -- are not comparable to the vast majority of schools. In fact, the number of colleges requiring tests increased by only **one** from last year, as several schools suspended admissions testing requirements. The national picture of test optional and test free admissions is actually very stable."

He added, "The Trump Administration's decision to demand standardized testing, GPA, race and gender data from colleges to determine whether university admissions meet its definition of 'merit', and its touting of bringing Ivy Plus institutions to heel on admissions, should not impact the ability of other colleges to determine that requiring SAT/ACT scores does not serve the school's interests in finding the best fit of qualified candidates for admission. Given the family income and racial disparities inherent in SAT/ACT results, the push by the Administration can credibly be viewed as an effort to deny opportunity to and stunt the advancement of racial minorities and economically disadvantaged students."

"Holistic practices continue to dominate college admissions, as they should."

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Akil Bello, FairTest's Admissions Testing Policy Expert Analyst noted that these admissions testing trends are decades in the making and provide a substantial record of the effectiveness of test optional and test free policies. "Even prior to the COVID spike of test optional institutions, nearly half of all four-year colleges had adopted test optional or test free admissions, including leading institutions like Bowdoin, Middlebury, NYU, Wake Forest, Wesleyan, Emory and the University of Chicago. Decades of university research has shown that they typically result in more applicants, more applicants from underrepresented and economically challenged populations, and admission of a greater social and intellectual cross-section of society. Non-submitting students achieve, persist and graduate comparably to those who submitted test scores. High school GPA is still the best indicator of college success except perhaps at a handful of unique institutions."

Among well-known institutions whose test-optional policies continue at least through fall 2027 are Emory, the University of Chicago, the University of Southern California, as well as liberal arts colleges Amherst, Bowdoin, Middlebury, Swarthmore, Wesleyan, and Williams. State higher education systems in most states, including Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oregon, and Washington, remain test-optional for current high school seniors and juniors. The entire University of California and California State University systems are currently permanently test-blind/score-free.

Here is a breakdown of test optional and free schools by category:

National Reality vs. the Institutions Dominating Coverage

Institution group	Confirmed n	Opt/Free	Required	Opt/Free %	No-score share (2024, mean)
All active, confirmed	2,182	2,021	161	92.6%	62.4% (TO), 27.8% (Req)*
Ranked Top 100 (at any time)	262	233	29	88.9%	--
State Flagships	52	46	6	88.5%	47.2%
Admit rate <30% (either of last 2 yrs)	104	84	20	80.8%	42.4%-50.4%
Ivy Plus	12	4	8	33.3%	24.9%
HBCUs	86	77	9	89.5%	61.1%

*Mean percent of enrolled students without SAT/ACT scores (IPEDS 2024), split by current policy: institutions that are Test Optional average 62.4% enrolling without scores; institutions that Require scores average 27.8% (a nonzero figure since IPEDS reports enrollment, not admission gatekeeping, and some required-testing schools still enroll transfer or exempt students without scores on file).

FairTest's frequently updated list of schools that do not require all or many applicants to submit ACT/SAT scores before admissions decisions are made is available free online at: <https://fairtest.org/test-optional-list/>. We have also updated our site to include a



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variety of data analysis tools, including breakdowns of policies by school category and tracking historical trends.

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ACT/SAT-OPTIONAL & TEST-FREE UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION BY THE NUMBERS

2,021 out of 2,182 confirmed ranked four-year colleges test-optional or test-free for Fall 2027. **92.6%** of confirmed schools with announced policies

161 schools require test scores for Fall 2027 (up by **1** from 160 for Fall 2026)