Examining Standardized Testing in the Context of University Admissions

A Policy Discussion
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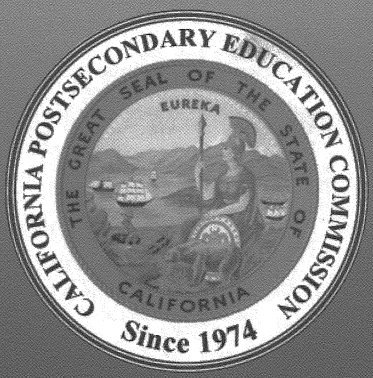

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The Role of the Commission

Central to the statutory responsibility of the California Postsecondary Education Commission is its role to advance a public dialogue on the needs of the people, the needs of the State, and the issues that affect the ability of the State's postsecondary education enterprise to meet those needs.

At its June 4-5, 2001 meeting, the Commission invited leading educators and commentators to enter into a discussion on standardized testing, long considered an important issue as it relates to the preparation and admission of students. The Commission wanted to explore the shortcomings and advantages of standardized testing, as well as to obtain some strategic recommendations to address the issue for the future.

The public dialogue was enhanced by the presence and participation of Nicholas Lemann, author of The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy; University of California President Richard Atkinson; Richard Ferguson, President of ACT; and the Honorable Gaston Caperton, President and CEO of The College Board.

This monograph is a synopsis of the public dialogue on standardized testing and is illustrative of the Commission's myriad tasks and responsibilities. The Commission continues to focus its attention on matters that affect the ability of the State's citizens to prepare for a lifetime of changing careers and opportunities. As the State's postsecondary education planning and coordinating agency, the Commission's strength is founded in the identification, enhancement, and mobilization of forces across the State and in its planning processes, which are strategic in purpose and aimed at taking advantage of real opportunities to improve the lives of Californians. In all that it does, the Commission seeks to create wider understanding of and support for higher education and its role in the economic development of the state and in the lives of its citizens.

Warren H. Fox, Ph.D
Executive Director

June 2001

To: The Governor, the Legislature and interested parties
From: The California Postsecondary Education Commission
Subject: Standardized Testing and University Admissions

As educators, policy makers and the public search for the right reforms to improve the education system and student achievement, one of the tools most frequently brought into play is standardized testing. The nationwide call for increased testing is not without controversy. Proponents argue that without testing, no one knows what students are learning, how teachers are performing and which schools are doing a good job. Under the best of conditions, testing provides an identical yardstick against which everyone can be measured. Critics, however, say that the best of conditions rarely exist. Many tests are unfair, failing to align with the curriculum that students are taught, and some are believed to be racially biased. They also argue that standardized tests are too limited, too imprecise and too stifling for both students and teachers, injecting a "teach-to-the-test" mindset into the classroom that leaves little room for serendipitous learning and creative thinking.

Despite the disagreements, standardized testing has emerged on the national scene and in California as vital and integral to education reform. Identifying the right tests and using them in the right context, however, remains a challenge.

Earlier this year, University of California President Richard C. Atkinson took up that challenge in the context of university admissions. He made two recommendations regarding UC admissions policies: 1) that any standardized tests used be measurements of mastery of subject matter rather than intelligence or aptitude; and 2) that the admissions process be revamped to look at applicants in a holistic, comprehensive manner rather than through the filter of a narrowly defined, quantitative formula. In putting forth these recommendations, Atkinson specifically proposed the elimination of the SAT I as a UC admissions requirement.

The proposal generated immediate headlines. Reactions ranged from the gratitude of high school students who feel the pressure of the SAT looming in their future and the satisfaction felt by those who believe the test is not the best indicator of students' potential capabilities, to the unhappiness of those who fear this is a step towards watering down UC's standards and the doubt harbored by those who wonder what will take the SAT's place. But for many, the response was uncertainty. Is this the right step? What will it solve? What unintended consequences might it bring?

To begin to answer these questions and to understand the context for Atkinson's recommendations, the California Postsecondary Education Commission invited several education experts to present their views during a Commission meeting on June 4 and 5, 2001. Appearing as invited guests were Nicholas Lemann, author of *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy;* UC President Richard Atkinson; Richard Ferguson, President of American College Testing (home to the ACT test); and Gaston Caperton, President and CEO of The College Board (overseer for the SAT). In addition, Marc F. Bernstein, President of Kaplan Learning Services, made a presentation.

The following paper summarizes the comments of each speaker and presents material from the question-and-answer sessions that followed each presentation. In offering this overview of different perspectives, the Commission hopes to provide a common foundation for the vigorous policy discussion that is sure to precede any decision about changing the role of the SAT I in university admissions.

Sincerely,

Alan S. Arkatov
Chair, California Postsecondary Education Commission

SAT: The Historical Context
Nicholas Lemann

Nicholas Lemann is author of The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy, *a book that examines the history of standardized testing and the turn toward meritocracy in major universities. A 1976 graduate of Harvard with a degree in American history and literature, Lemann is a staff writer for* The New Yorker. *He is the former national correspondent for* The Atlantic Monthly, *as well as a former writer and editor at* The Washington Monthly, Texas Monthly, *and* The Washington Post. *He is the author of the award-winning* The Promised Land: the Great Black Migration and How It Changed America.

This is an important time in the country. Congress is about to pass the most far-reaching education legislation in 35 years. There is an enormous debate taking place in government and among the public about how to improve student achievement. Much of the discussion and action does not directly affect higher education, but the type and magnitude of change underway eventually will impact all levels of education.

When I was writing my book, I thought any policy debate about the SAT would not take place within my lifetime. I didn't dream the issues that are raised in the book would become part of the national debate. Thanks to Richard Atkinson, they have.

I think the way I can be most useful in this dialogue is to lay out the history of the SAT and provide the context for how these tests are used today in college admissions.

The College Entrance Examination Board was set up in 1900, long pre-dating Educational Testing Services. The board was the interface between high schools and colleges. The participants were dominated by a handful of elite New England prep schools and the Ivy League universities. Each side got something out of the arrangement. The universities wanted a standardized entrance test as a way of forcing curriculum changes at high schools. Their goal was a more uniformly and reliably prepared set of students. What the high schools were looking for was a uniform set of requirements so that students did not have to meet different criteria when applying to multiple universities.

The original College Board exams were a curriculum-based battery of tests that were given over several days in a few locations and were hand graded. But universities were dissatisfied with the excessively narrow pool of students that resulted. As a practical matter, students had to have access to a boarding-school-quality curriculum and live near a handful of New England test centers.

In a drive to broaden the pool to the economic middle class and geographic "middle" America, Harvard University borrowed and revised a World War I intelligence test to create the SAT. The concept was to factor out high school quality. If an extraordinarily smart student went to a mediocre public high school with a narrow curriculum, the intelligence test would indicate his potential rather than his possibly limited achievements. Harvard used the test to select special scholarship students beginning in 1926 and noted that the students did well.

By 1938, Harvard had persuaded all of the College Board colleges to use the exam for scholarship students. For the next few years, 10,000 to 12,000 students a year took the test. Then during World War II, the traditional College Board essay exams were suspended. When the war ended, the SAT was the College Board admissions test.

The attraction was fundamental. The same test could be given to millions of people in many locations all at the same time and could be scored quickly and in bulk. There was, however, an underlying agenda that was discussed and perhaps even debated in the highest academic circles but was never the subject of public forums or a democratic decision-making process. That agenda was the creation of a Jeffersonian natural aristocracy from all corners of the nation, an elite group of intelligent people who would be educated on scholarships and then sent out to perform public service.

Test Validity

Q. Does it come down to picking the best predictor of performance – how well you take tests or what do you know?

Lemann: The validation of what kind of test best predicts college performance takes place in a very narrow range. It's all about how well high school performance, on either an aptitude or an achievement test, predicts performance in college just a few months later. It's an attempt to find out how well a student will do as a freshman, but I don't think that should count for everything. The decision is so important and has such a huge impact on a person's life – who will go to college and who won't based on the nuances of how someone did on a test at a single point in time. Predicting how a person will do as a freshman simply should not be the sole criteria for college admissions.

The next step was to expand the reach and make the admissions test national in scope. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), funded by the Carnegie Foundation, was created to achieve that goal. ETS took on the test administration function. The students taking the test paid the fees directly to ETS. Since it was cost free and widely used, colleges had little incentive not to require the test, and its standardized use spread rapidly.

The one area of initial resistance was the public institutions. The key concept behind the SAT – find the intellectual elite and groom them for service – was antithetical to the mission of public universities. These institutions traditionally were open in the selection process, accepting a high percentage of applicants and accepting that there would be a large number of dropouts. The ethos was "some won't make it but everyone should have an opportunity." Conversely, the SAT was like Cinderella's glass slipper, with a search of the whole kingdom for the "right" people to bring to the palace.

It took 20 years to talk the University of California system into using the test, and even then it was implemented gradually. One impetus, no doubt, was the increasingly large number of applicants and the need to more efficiently select those who would succeed.

During the same time that ETS was busy establishing and spreading the SAT, American College Testing was created with an entirely different vision. ACT was rooted in the belief that public universities should be open as much as possible and that this was best accomplished by having an achievement test for admissions rather than an aptitude or intelligence test. The results would be used for placement, determining how to handle the students once they were in place in the university.

National Curriculum

Q. Your proposal for a national achievement test seems to point to the need for a national curriculum. Wouldn't that be difficult to achieve?

Lemann: I have the luxury of being an author so I can think about what should be rather than what is possible in the short term. I think a national curriculum is a good idea, and we are moving in that direction. The Advanced Placement program is the closest thing we have to a national curriculum – an upper track in high school that is standardized across the nation. What we see happening today is that states are taking more control of curriculum matters away from districts, and the state standards are converging. There are 17,000 districts in America and they don't each have individual curriculums. There already is a lot of overlap and alignment. One of the things that is most attractive about a national curriculum is that you would build a floor under what a school needs to provide to all students, and there would be a common minimum standard that we don't now have to drive improvement.

The two institutions were ferociously competitive. At one point, ETS considered dropping the SAT in favor of a test of developed abilities – one that would have been more like the ACT – but they didn't do it, largely because they felt the SAT is a good test that is cheap to administer and reliable in its results. They also had one large reality on their side: The United States has a decentralized system of high schools with a range of curriculum and standards. That makes it difficult to assess students fairly and equally unless the test is curriculum-free – as the SAT is.

So with this brief summary of the history, that brings us to today and the current policy issues surrounding the use of the SAT in university admissions practices. The case for the SAT is that it is at least somewhat predictive of student performance in college, particularly for the early part of the undergraduate experience.

But some of the support for the SAT rests on the assumption that the test will be appropriately used in the admissions process. This means that the student's score is going to be put in context with other information about the student and not just used to establish who will enter and who will not based on a single number.

Another assumption that underlies continued support for the SAT is that you can't really prepare for the test, despite the large number of review courses that are available today. That's important because the test's critics believe that people with resources can pay for assistance that will result in higher scores, while people without those resources are at a disadvantage. The College Board denies that prep courses make a difference.

What concerns me is that the debate is so narrow. It tends to be focused on how useful the test is to the admissions office. But the moment between high school and college is very important in a person's life and it does not seem either right or fair to me to decide what's best based solely on what admissions offices want. The question should be how do you get the most benefit for all without taking information away from admissions officials.

Test Prep Courses

Q. If we move to achievement tests, will that do away with test preparation courses and the advantage that people with resources have?

Lemann: As long as tests have consequences, people who have money will try to manipulate the results. The difference will be that the test will be more like the school experience – covering course material – and the end result will be based on learning more. If the test is about mastery of curriculum, then the way to raise the test scores will be to study the material more. It won't be based on test-taking tricks or games, but on actual learning.

I personally favor a transition away from the SAT to achievement tests for several reasons. The SAT is taken by many students to be an intelligence test, an indicator of how smart they are, something over which they have no control. I think it would be better psychologically to have them take an achievement test that measures what they know rather than ranks them by ability. In addition, an achievement test would provide an incentive for mastering their course work in high school. It would motivate them to study in school in ways that the SAT does not.

Achievement tests can also be used as a tool to drive high school improvement. Such tests measure whether a school is teaching students and provides an incentive for them to address the quality of the curriculum and teaching.

It is also naïve to believe that the SAT will be used appropriately. Colleges that don't have large admissions staffs or that have huge pools of applicants simply feed SAT scores into a computer. Rather than assume the test will be used appropriately, we need to design tests to withstand misuse.

I applaud the national momentum at all levels of education to move away from judging aptitude to measuring achievement. In addition to linking college admission to something that a student can control, it also shines a spotlight on K-12 school performance. With the focus shifting to what students know, states will feel pressure to step up to the plate and ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve.

UC and the SAT
Richard C. Atkinson, University of California President

Richard C. Atkinson has been president of the University of California since 1995. Prior to that, he served for 15 years as chancellor of the University of California, San Diego. He is a former director of the National Science Foundation, past president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, former chair of the Association of American Universities, and former long-term member of the faculty at Stanford University. He is a member and was chairman of the National Research Council's Board on Testing and Assessment. In addition, he was a Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the Educational Testing Service and was a member of the Board of the American College Testing Program, Inc.

In February 2001, I addressed the American Council on Education in a speech titled "Standardized Tests and Access to American Universities." In the speech, I outlined my two-part proposal to the Academic Senate of the University of California regarding changes to the admissions process. First, I recommended that the university no longer require the SAT I, instead replacing it with a standardized test that is related to the A-through-G courses that we require students to complete to be eligible for admission. And second, I urged that we move to a comprehensive review of applicants in a holistic way. Both proposals are under consideration by the Academic Senate, which should offer its opinion this fall, and then the matter can go before the UC Regents.

Let me clarify that I am not opposed to the use of standardized tests. By and large, they are very useful. In medicine, they have national tests at the end of the second and fourth years that are correlated with the curriculum. They are good measures of what students have learned. That's not true of the SAT I, which is not correlated with any curriculum. There are good reasons to have an exam that is based on the curriculum. It indicates to students that it is important that they do well in their course work if they want to do well on the exam. And the results of such tests send a message to each school about how the school is doing in comparison with others.

Since I made the presentation about my proposals, new information has come to my attention. For some time, UC has required both the SAT I and SAT II tests – three one-hour tests of math, writing and a subject of the student's choice. Because UC enrolls a large number of students and has required these tests for many years, we have been able to collect the data that allows us to make judgments about the value of different tests in our admissions process. Today, I am providing a paper that presents preliminary findings on the relative contribution of high school grade point average (HSGPA), SAT I and SAT II scores in predicting college success for 81,722 first-time freshmen who entered UC over the past four years, from Fall 1996 through Fall 1999, inclusive. The results are displayed in the table. What the findings show is that when the SAT I is included with the high school GPA and the SAT II, the SAT I adds only .1 percent to our ability to predict performance. Basically, it adds nothing to the admissions process.

Explained Variance in UC First-Year GPA Accounted for by HSGPA,* SAT I and SAT II Scores

Predicator Variables	*1996-99*
1. HSGPA	0.145
2. SAT I	0.128
3. SAT II	0.153
4. SAT I + SAT II	0.156
5. HSGPA + SAT I	0.197
6. HSGPA + SAT II	0.210
7. HSGPA + SAT I + SAT II	0.211
SAT I increment (7-6)	**.001**

* High school grade point average

So the idea of moving away from the SAT I and toward achievement tests is based on several concepts:

1. We won't lose any advantage that we now have by requiring it.
2. We will be sending the right message to students, namely that performance in high school counts.
3. We will be encouraging students to spend time on coursework rather than focusing on things like the verbal analogies that are on the SAT I.
4. These changes complement the K-12 reforms that have been launched in California that establish clear curricular guidelines, set high academic standards and assess student achievement through standardized tests.

Why the Freshman Focus?

Q. Why do universities focus on freshman performance as the outcome that should be of concern at the time of admission? Is that a good criteria to use for whether someone is going to be successful in college or in life?

Atkinson: Probably not. But it is the easiest outcome to look at because of the short time frame involved, so it is the thing that gets looked at the most often. We could look at graduation rates, the time it takes to earn a degree, or success in life. But more variables begin to enter in and outcomes are more difficult to track. So most often, we simply look at the potential freshman performance.

Since I gave the speech proposing the elimination of the SAT I as an entrance requirement, I've been flooded with mail and e-mails containing fascinating stories about how the SAT has been used and misused. One young Mexican-American woman who is an honors graduate from both UC Berkeley and Princeton was being interviewed by a prominent consulting firm. Though the interviewer was obviously impressed by her record of achievement, he asked to see her SAT results – and then reflected surprise that she had done that well academically when she did not have high scores. Too many people seem to view the SAT I as some type of indicator of intelligence.

Although my comments today have mainly been about changing the standardized test requirements, the second part of my proposal is also quite important – a more holistic approach to evaluating a student for admission. UC campuses are already moving in that direction, looking at the quality of the high school and the environment in which the student was raised.

We need to remember that UC has a particularly difficult responsibility to fulfill. As the public institution entrusted by the state to educate its top high school graduates, it must set high standards. At the same time, UC must set standards that are attainable by individual students attending any of the state's comprehensive high schools. UC must also be mindful that it serves the most racially and ethnically diverse college-going population in the nation. The university system must be careful to make certain that its standards do not unfairly discriminate against any students.

Critical Thinking Skills

Q. Do achievement tests have the capability to indicate critical thinking skills? Isn't the SAT I a better measure of cognitive reasoning ability?

Atkinson: I'm sure that the SAT will find some student who does poorly in school but scores well because they are bright – although I haven't seen many examples. But aren't we also measuring a student's ability to reason in achievement tests? I think we are. The College Board says the SAT measures reasoning, but if you know the definition of the words in the analogies, then finding the right answer isn't that hard. Do we believe that IQ tests measure intelligence? I don't think so, and many in the field agree. So looking at any single measure is really a mistake.

If the proposed changes are adopted, UC will be reaffirming its commitment to assessing students in their full complexity. Such decisions are difficult because they involve making sense of grades earned in different courses taught at different schools. They require that judgments be made about the opportunities available to individual students. They call on admissions officers to look into the future and make judgments about what individual applicants might contribute to campus life and, later, to society. These are extraordinarily tough decisions. But the stakes are too high not to ensure that the job is done right.

Standardized Testing and the Implications for College Admissions
Richard L. Ferguson, President of ACT Inc.

Richard L. Ferguson, who joined ACT Inc. in 1972, has been President of the company since 1988. From 1975 to the present, he has been affiliated with the University of Iowa Psychological and Quantitative Foundations Department in the College of Education, teaching graduate-level courses in testing and also sitting on thesis committees. As a research associate at the University of Pittsburgh, Ferguson directed a National Science Foundation project on the use of computers in providing individualized education to students.

Much of the presentations have been or will be about the SAT. My interest today is to provide information about ACT, a test established in 1959. There's a tendency to think of ACT as a Midwest test, but it's the predominant program used by college applicants in the majority of states.

The philosophy behind the ACT is really captured in our mission statement: helping people make informed decisions about education and work. We provide information for life's transitions because we believe people are more likely to make good decisions if they have good information. Another philosophy that we embrace is that all individuals can learn – the issue is how to facilitate that learning.

The ACT is an achievement test that tells what students know and are able to do. It is a curriculum-based test; we do a national curriculum study every three years and across the nation we have discussions with a representative sample of teachers for grades 7 through 12 and college faculty for entry-level courses. Our whole orientation is subject matter. The test is anchored in what is being taught. We've matched it to the California standards and there is significant overlap between what we are testing and what the state is requiring students to know.

National Test

Q. Should there be a national test around competencies?

Ferguson: There's almost a de facto national assessment now because of the overlapping achievement tests. The pluses are being able to compare performance so that you know where you need to focus resources. If the country were committed to interventions and not just really using the tests as a hammer to drive school reform, that would be best. We haven't been very good about taking test results and doing something about them. At some point, you have to get down into the classroom and have an impact there. If a national curriculum and a national assessment produced that result, then we'd be for them.

What that means is that the best test preparation is a rigorous core secondary course schedule. With this type of test, you can't easily improve scores except to focus more intensely on the subject matter. There is no problem with "teaching to the test" because to do so is to emphasize the course material. When students put their energy into preparing for the test, they essentially are pursuing skills that they need to master, whether it is in English, math or other subjects.

An ACT assessment takes a more holistic view of a student. There are assessments in four core content areas: English, math, reading and science reasoning. There is the inventory that shows the areas the student is interested in. And finally there is the student profile survey, which reflects the student's extracurricular activities and involvement.

Issue of Discrimination

Q. From time to time, claims have been made that the SAT is discriminatory. Is that an issue with the ACT?

Ferguson: Because of the subject matter focus and the process to ensure fairness, I think the likelihood of bias just isn't there. If there is a skill in math that you need to be able to perform, the ACT distinguishes those who know it from those who don't. If there are more who don't know the skill from one group, the question isn't is there test bias, it is what can we do to better prepare that group.

While it is an achievement test, the ACT also assesses critical thinking and analytical skills. This is especially true in math and science, where students are required to use interpretive analysis, reasoning and problem solving.

Fairness is also a goal of the ACT and we believe we have put in place a system that ensures fairness. First, the test is based on what is being taught since it is developed in conjunction with college and high school faculty. Second, the writers have diverse backgrounds, just as many student today do. And third, we conduct pre-tests to ensure fairness. In fact, after taking coursework, grades and the quality of high school into account, race and ethnicity are associated with only 1 percent of the variability in ACT scores.

While the admissions decision is based on many factors, the ACT has a good predictive validity for freshman-year performance. There's a reason for a focus on the freshman year. If students are not well-prepared, the vast majority will fall out by the end of the first semester or first year. The socialization of the institution begins to have an impact on performance after the first year. So the admissions process, to some degree, is about determining who is ready to succeed in college.

But the ACT is designed to be used – and is used – for other purposes. It's important for course placement and student advising. Entry placement is critical for students. They may not have the entry-level skills to succeed in certain courses, and without proper placement they may become discouraged and drop out. The ACT helps determine the level of skill, and also can be used by a counselor to help guide the student.

In recent years, we've broadened our assessment activities with the creation of the Education Planning and Assessment System. This is a three-part program:

- It begins with Explore in the 8th grade, a very critical time when students make decisions regarding the path they will take in high school. If they make ill-informed decisions, they may limit their choices about what they can do later in life. This program gives them the same four assessments in the ACT and can help guide their thinking about what they need to do next.
- The second component is Plan in the 10th grade. Now students really need to get serious because they aren't that far from choosing a program of study and institution. This part helps them determine if they are on the path and if they aren't, what they need to do to get there. They can tell from the data that they will have a certain score depending on what courses they take in their last few semesters.
- The final part is the traditional ACT assessment in the 12th grade.

Unique California

Q. When you look at California, what makes us unique compared to other states where you offer the ACT?

Ferguson: The diversity of the state makes California unique. Other states have one or two issues, but virtually every issue is here. That means greater complexity. But the good part about the ACT is that you just can't argue about the skill set. If you need to be able to perform and have a defined skill, then the test isn't important – it's what we do to make sure that that skill is there. The California standards for K-12 just aren't that different from elsewhere.

We have used the program successfully in Illinois, Colorado and Oklahoma, where we have seen an increase in the number of students taking core courses, an increase in ACT scores, and an increase in the number of students entering higher education. The EPAS is critical if we really think the aim is to get students better prepared for college. In a similar effort, you can see higher education becoming much more involved in what is happening in K-12 education for the very same reasons.

In summary, the ACT's approach is:

- Plan-oriented – admissions is a process, not an event, and students need to begin to prepare early.
- Curriculum-based – it measures skills linked to the state's standards and that are needed for subsequent academic success.
- Comprehensive – the student isn't just a test score.
- Versatile – it can be used for multiple purposes, including selection, placement and counseling.
- Student-centered – it is focused on finding out what the student knows and what needs to be done to address any gaps.

The SAT I and College Admissions
Gaston Caperton, President of the College Board

Since 1999, Gaston Caperton has been President of the College Board, which oversees the SAT exams and Advanced Placement program. Caperton is a former two-term governor of West Virginia, serving from 1988 to 1996. He came to the College Board from Columbia University, where he founded and led the Institute on Education and Government. He also taught at Harvard University as a fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics. He was the 1996 chair of the Democratic Governors' Association, as well as chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Southern Regional Education Board and the Southern Growth Policy Board. A graduate of the University of North Carolina, he was a successful businessman prior to his political career.

The following is an excerpt from the written remarks that are the basis for Gaston Caperton's oral presentation:

To put my remarks in context, I would like to tell you briefly about the College Board. The College Board was founded in 1900 to help high school students make a successful transition to higher education. At that time, the handful of colleges that formed the membership association known as the College Entrance Examination Board tried to make the admission process simple for students and for colleges. With the College Board's revolutionary development of a "common entrance examination," students could apply to a number of institutions without having to sit for entrance examinations at each one.

Later, a new multiple-choice assessment was developed that would come to be known as the SAT I. One of its main benefits was that young people could provide evidence of their ability without regard to their family's background and despite inconsistent grading systems and curriculum standards throughout the nation's high schools.

In later years, the association developed additional assessments to provide assistance in placement and the awarding of college credit, such as the Advanced Placement program and the College-Level Examination Program. Resources to help students conduct a successful college search were made available, and the College Scholarship Service was organized to provide financial aid information.

Teaching to the Test

Q. What about the problem of teaching to the test and the fact that some students can afford prep courses and others can't?

Caperton: If teaching to the test means learning to read well and do algebra, then the whole education process would benefit from teaching that is focused on helping students with the SAT I. Access to prep courses is unequal, but there are many projects underway to provide free or low-cost preparation over the Internet and through special centers. There will always remain some inequality. But the real inequity is in the schooling the child has gotten from the K-12 system. The inequality of access to prep courses is miniscule in comparison. The SAT I is a fair test when you have an unfair education system.

Racial Bias

Q. You hear all the time that the SAT I is culturally or racially biased. And the perception certainly in the Latino community is that your product denies Latinos a fair opportunity to go to a selective institution.

Caperton: Absolutely not – the SAT I is not biased. What it reflects is unequal education in the K-12 system. I deeply believe in truth, not perception, and when you look at the data, this is not a biased test. And if the SAT II achievement tests were taken by more students, I believe we would begin to see the same disparities in that because of the inequitable education system. The implication is that if we get rid of the SAT I, everything would be alright for underrepresented students – and that is not the case. Leaders in these communities should not trade off getting rid of the SAT I versus improving education. Dropping the SAT I may be politically smart, but it won't change anything. The real challenge is how to marry equity and excellence in education for everyone.

Q. We recognize that the real problem is inequity of education. But the SAT I continues the inequity – it measures it, manifests it and uses it to limit seats in higher education institutions.

Caperton: If you look at grades or the SAT II tests, you have the same problem. The only way to eliminate the problem is to make the school system equal.

Today, the College Board's mission is to prepare, inspire, and connect students to college and opportunity, with a commitment to equity and excellence. In the year 2000, our 100th anniversary year, our reach and scope was:

- A membership of more than 3,900 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations.
- More than 800,000 students took the Advanced Placement exams.
- More than 2.3 million students in 20,000 high schools took the PSAT.
- More than 2,260,000 college-bound students took the SAT.

In commenting on President Atkinson's SAT I proposal, it is important that I explain that I have great respect for him as a world-renowned scholar and education leader. However, I strongly disagree with key points he has made about the SAT I.
I offer five observations:

1. What President Atkinson didn't say in his speech is as important as what he said.
   - ➢ He didn't say the SAT I is biased.
   - ➢ He didn't say the SAT I is poorly designed.
   - ➢ He didn't say the test was poorly administered.
   - ➢ He didn't say the SAT I was not an effective predictor of performance.
   - ➢ He didn't say how much it could cost to build a new test.
   - ➢ He didn't say how a new test would be a better predictor and better tool for the admissions process.
2. President Atkinson did say that dropping the SAT I will "help strengthen high school curricula and pedagogy, and would help all students, especially low-income and minority students, determine their own educational destinies." I don't think anyone in this room, on serious reflection, believes that dropping the SAT I will have a major impact on improving education in California's high schools or helping disadvantaged students control their educational destinies. It won't change the effects of Proposition 13 or Proposition 209. It won't change the high school education of the 23 percent of California students who are limited-English speakers. It won't help California recruit and retain better teachers and stronger principals. It won't turn around a school culture too often filled with apathy and low expectations. And it won't change the fact that California had the 6th highest education funding in the United States in 1966 and today ranks only 40th in education funding. Those of us who have been in the struggle to improve schools and education in general know that there is no silver bullet. Certainly dropping the SAT I is not a silver bullet for addressing the many challenges in the California education system.

3. President Atkinson also talks about "the mystery of what the SAT I is supposed to measure." It is not a mystery at all. The verbal test measures reading comprehension and vocabulary. The math test measures the ability to solve problems using basic arithmetic, algebra and some geometry. All of these skills are critical for success in college. That is why the SAT I was developed, has endured, and is an accurate predictor of college performance.

4. President Atkinson advocates using a holistic approach to admissions. We are in complete agreement. Most of the best colleges and universities in the country have been using a holistic approach to admissions for years. Two examples are from the University of California system: Berkeley and UCLA. Berkeley has been reading full applications since 1985 and UCLA since 1990. Both universities continue to use the SAT I for additional information in the admission process. In his remarks, President Atkinson questioned whether there would be many students whose abilities would show up differently on the SAT I than on the SAT II. We find that about 70 percent of the students have scores on the SAT I and II that correlate. Another 15 percent do better on the achievement tests than on the SAT I. And 15 percent will have SAT I scores that are far better than their achievement scores would indicate. So there are real examples of students who the SAT I identifies as college material that otherwise would not do well in the admissions process.

5. President Atkinson says he was inspired to take action when he visited an upscale private school in California and found 12-year-olds studying analogies that would help them on the SAT I. I was and am always moved to action every time I visit schools, especially when I see first-hand America's unequal education system. America's unequal education system is the greatest threat to our democracy and is a national tragedy. The problem is not the SAT I. The problem is not about the learning capacity of our students. The problem is the unequal education system.

Gap Not that Great?

Q. You say the focus should be on K-12 achievement and President Atkinson says he is trying to focus students' attention on achievement. The gap between you isn't that great.

Caperton: But he says that by eliminating the SAT I, all of these improvements will happen and I totally disagree with that. He says he wants to focus on achievement, not aptitude, and that he wants to students to concentrate on studying. The SAT I is not an aptitude test. It's about the core competency of reading and math. Learning how to read and answer questions is an important achievement for students.

When viewed by history, this disagreement about the SAT I will not be important. When viewed by history, the inequity of our school system will be seen as one of our nation's most important challenges and opportunities. Today's challenge is not the debate about dropping the SAT I; it is fixing the unequal opportunity for education, particularly for low-income communities and particularly for minority and rural students. I hope that soon the University of California and the College Board will be focused on this critical and larger issue that will affect the future of our children.

In California, you can do just about anything you want to. I think about this state's ability, courage and wealth, in human resources and dollars. You have the capacity to do remarkable things. California has the will and the ability and the strength to be a leader in this fight to provide equal education for all students.

Leveling the Playing Field at the University of California
Marc F. Bernstein, President of Kaplan K-12 Learning Services

Marc F. Bernstein, who holds a doctorate in education and is President of Kaplan K-12 Learning Services, asked for the opportunity to address the California Postsecondary Education Commission about the proposal to eliminate the SAT I for University of California admissions. The following is an excerpt from his submitted written statement.

UC President Richard Atkinson has proposed abandoning the SAT I in the UC admissions process. His goal is to employ achievement tests that more closely reflect the curriculum that students study in school, and thereby encourage the public schools to provide more rigorous curriculum and instruction. While achievement tests offer some clear benefits, intended to reward students who do well in their classes, they do not offer a simple solution for reducing the ethnic score gap that exists on the SAT I.

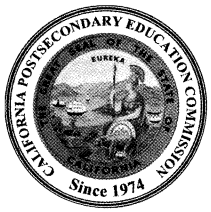
We at Kaplan draw this conclusion based upon our analysis of student performance on achievement tests, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Advanced Placement (AP) exams, SAT II subject tests, the New York State Regents Exams and the Stanford 9. All of these assessments reveal significant gaps between either white and underrepresented minority students or gaps based on parent income. Here is a brief look at score gaps across a number of subject-based examinations:

- NAEP – On the reading trends test, the average score of African American students at age 17 was roughly the same as that of white students at age 13. In science, the average score of African American and Hispanic students at age 13 were lower than the average score of white students at age 9. On the fourth grade reading trends test, 73 percent of white students performed at or above the basic level compared with just 42 percent of Hispanic students and 37 percent of African American students.
- AP exams (five-point scale with five the highest score) – The range in score gaps on national mean AP scores for African American and Hispanics is more than .6 and up to 1.2 points across the most popular AP exams.
- SAT II – The three most popular SAT II exams are Writing, Mathematics Level IC and U.S. History. The average scores for white students are 618, 595 and 598 respectively. For Latino students, the average scores are 547, 533 and 561 respectively. The average scores for African American students are 536, 515 and 524 respectively.
- New York Regents – The data from the 2000 tests are not disaggregated by ethnicity but by income level (e.g., high need equals low income). In the high-need districts, 74 percent of students are minority. In these high-need, high-minority districts, as many as 61 percent of students did not meet reading standards in 2000. In contrast, in low-need districts, only 16 percent of students did not meet the standards.
- Stanford 9 – In 48 large cities across the country, white students scored higher in reading comprehension and total math in grades 4, 8 and 10 than any other ethnic group. In California specifically, the same kinds of gaps are seen between lower-income and higher-income students. In 2000, 64 percent of California's non-economically disadvantaged 8th graders scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading while only 28 percent of disadvantaged students did so. Eighth graders on the math test showed a similar gap of 61 percent versus 29 percent.

The University of California system is the most elite public university in the nation. The challenges it faces are great. California's fast-growing high school population is outpacing the number of spaces available on UC campuses. And the effects of Proposition 209 continue to place pressure on the entire UC system.

While seeking to address these issues, President Atkinson's proposal for emphasizing SAT II and eliminating SAT I does not appear to level the playing field. It is more likely, based on Kaplan's analysis, that certain ethnic groups, such as African-Americans, will be negatively effected if a premature change is made.

California Postsecondary Education Commission



A citizen board established in 1974 by the Legislature and Governor to provide them with independent, non-partisan policy analysis and recommendations about California education beyond the high school and to coordinate the efforts of California's colleges and universities in order "to assure the effective utilization of public postsecondary education resources, thereby eliminating waste and unnecessary duplication, and to promote diversity, innovation, and responsiveness to student and societal needs."

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*Terms are for six years and expire in December of the year noted in parenthesis.
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