

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

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Analysis of recently released SAT scores

With all the recent focus on raising high school graduation rates, increasing the rigor of our curriculum, and providing supports for at-risk students, we expected to see at least a marginal climb in SAT scores this year. Instead Georgia's average score slid 6 points from 2008 to 2009. This year, Georgia ranks 18th among the 22 states with greater than 50 percent of students taking the test. The slide and resultant ranking signify that we must stop and closely examine what we are doing in education and where there might be a policy-practice disconnect.

The data provided in the College Board SAT report is extensive and gives us many clues about what might be impacting the final SAT scores of our students. In Georgia math is clearly a weakness. Of all three SAT subject areas, math is the one in which Georgia's students lag the nation by the widest margin (24 points). As students in Georgia take more math courses in high school, their average math SAT scores do increase, but at a lower rate than the national average.

For example, a 31 point gap separates the average math score of Georgia's test-takers who have taken 4 years of math courses from that of test-takers in the nation. As the new math curriculum continues to be rolled-out, we are hopeful that the SAT math scores will improve. Yet even in the areas of Reading and Writing (which have already been taught in our public schools using the new, more rigorous curriculum), Georgia still lags the nation by 11 and 14 points, respectively.

It isn't surprising that more years of math and English courses correlate with higher SAT scores. Yet the SAT data also reveals a correlation between higher scores and more years of foreign language study. Across the nation 61% of SAT test-takers had three or more years of foreign language study; in Georgia, the percentage was only 43. With the new high school graduation requirements not mandating foreign language courses, it will be more incumbent on school officials to stress the fact that a rigorous yet diversified set of courses will increase students' knowledge and skills in preparation for the SAT.

It is not enough just to get students across the state to receive a diploma at the end of the year. Their classes and teachers in high school must prepare them for success in the world beyond 12th grade. If the SAT is a measure of that preparation, then Georgia has much work to do.

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