

Texas gains on SAT as scores fall nationally

August 29, 2007

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Written by Terrence Stutz, Dallas Morning News

Texas students narrowed the long-standing gap on the SAT with their counterparts across the U.S. this year as their average math and reading scores both increased slightly while national averages dropped.

The College Board reported Tuesday that the average math score in Texas climbed to its highest level in more than a decade – up a point from last year, to 507. In reading, Texas students also improved their scores by a point from last year, to 492.

National scores, meanwhile, dropped three points in math – to 515 – and one point in reading – to 502. The combined math and reading scores were the lowest in eight years. The national averages were still significantly higher than those in Texas, however.

High school students also were tested in writing for the second year. Texas students had an average score of 482 in writing; the national average was 494. Both scores were down from a year ago.

A perfect score on each section of the SAT is 800.

"More Texas students than ever before are college-bound. It's a positive sign that more students took the college entrance test in 2007 than did in 2006, and they are earning higher math scores," said acting Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott.

Texas students in each major ethnic group registered higher average scores in math than their peer group nationally, according to the Texas Education Agency. But the state trailed the overall national average because it had a higher percentage of minority students taking the SAT. Minority students historically have scored lower than whites on the exam.

Mr. Scott said the increase in Texas' average reading score in came from gains among private-school students. Reading scores of students at public schools were unchanged from last year.



The drop in national scores coincided with an increased number of students – many of them minorities – taking the SAT.

Nearly 1.5 million students from the Class of 2007 took the SAT, with minority students making up about 40 percent of the total. In Texas, 132,000 seniors took the exam, with 47 percent identifying themselves as minority.

Among the five most populous states with large numbers of SAT-takers – California, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas – students in Texas ranked second in math and fourth in reading. Texas was tied for second in writing.

California students were first among the five states on all three sections of the SAT.

Mr. Scott said Texas is taking steps to better prepare its high school students for college, including a change – starting with this year's ninth-graders – that requires students to have four credits each in English, math, science and social studies. Students also will need 26 credits, instead of 24, to graduate.

By ethnic group in Texas, black students in public schools scored an average 436 in math and 430 in reading; Hispanics scored 466 in math and 448 in reading; and whites scored 536 in math and 520 in reading.

In taking the SAT, students were asked to designate at least one college or university they wanted to receive their test results for possible admission. The most popular choices among Texas students: University of Texas at Austin (40.1 percent), Texas A&M University (29.7 percent), Baylor University (19.3 percent), Texas Tech University (18.7 percent), Texas State University (17.9 percent) and University of North Texas (14.6 percent).