

Improving SAT Scores

Georgia Schools Share Promising Practices

**Georgia Department of Education
Linda C. Schrenko**

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From the State Superintendent

On behalf of myself and the staff of the Georgia Department of Education, I would like to thank the system and school educators who contributed to the development and production of this publication and made it possible.

We all agree on the importance of high standards and individual student achievement. The Scholastic Assessment Test, the SAT, is not only a measure of our students' attainment of those high standards, but also of the skill and dedication of our teachers and the leadership of our administrators. The ten school systems and 19 schools represented in this publication provide a sample of the excellent work being done by students, staff and leadership in schools all over Georgia.

I encourage each of you who read this – parents, local educators, concerned citizens, legislators, and our state's leadership alike – to help the schools where you live and work to adopt promising practices like those described in this publication. We should not forget, however, that “promising practices” are not enough in and of themselves. They must serve as a complement to each system's efforts to increase academic rigor and enhance students' access to more demanding curriculum. I therefore encourage you to put together plans for improving education in Georgia in general and plans to improve the success of our high school students on the SAT in particular.

Linda C. Schrenko

State Superintendent of Schools

Introduction

As more students in Georgia now have the opportunity to attend college with the help of the HOPE scholarship, college admission has become much more competitive. The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia recently initiated the Freshman Index¹ and brought greater emphasis to the academic preparation of Georgia's high school students. However, preparing students to meet the rigors of the college classroom is only one aspect of academic preparation. Getting students to the college or university of their choice is the first step in helping them reach their goals. Having a good Grade Point Average (GPA) is an important part of the college admission puzzle, but an equally significant piece is earning the increasingly higher SAT scores necessary for acceptance to college. Although this challenge is often much greater than we can anticipate, many schools in Georgia have taken on this task and have consistently raised their SAT scores.

This publication is the result of an inquiry conducted by the Research, Evaluation and Testing Division, Office of Student Learning and Achievement, of the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) during the 1999-2000 school year. The team examined the SAT scores of Georgia schools over a three-year period, and found that 62 schools, representing 48 school systems, showed improvement over all three years. The team then contacted a sample of the schools showing the most significant increases and systems with multiple schools showing a consistent increase to determine how they believed they were accomplishing this task. The results of the inquiry are presented in this publication so that all Georgia high schools can become aware of the strategies these schools considered instrumental in consistently improving their SAT scores over the last three years. The reader should remember, however, that these promising practices are not intended as "quick fixes" to be implemented alone. These practices must be seen as a part of a larger, systemic effort to establish challenging academic standards and to assure that all students have access to an increasingly demanding curriculum.

Within this publication you will find detailed descriptions of the strategies used by these sample schools (19 schools in 10 school systems), as well as statewide SAT improvement initiatives. Also included is a list of addresses and telephone numbers for each of the school system's contact person so that you may contact them for further information or visit their schools. If you need additional information, please contact the Research, Evaluation, and Testing Division; Georgia Department of Education; 1754 Twin Towers East; Atlanta, Georgia 30334; (phone) 404-656-2668 or through the website at www.doe.k12.ga.us.

¹ The Freshman Index (FI) determines eligibility for college admission. The FI is based on a student's SAT or American College Testing (ACT) score and high school core Grade Point Average (GPA).

Most Commonly Used Promising Practices

An analysis of the perceived reasons provided by schools and school systems for SAT score improvement has identified several SAT improvement strategies that are common across multiple systems. These are not all of the strategies reported by participating systems. They are, by far, only the most commonly mentioned. (See the section entitled *Individual System and School Practices*, page 14, for more strategies and plans.) The reader should also be aware that this is a collection of strategies that personnel from contributing schools believe, based on their professional opinions and their own experience, can account for their improved SAT scores. There has been no systematic research that proves the connection between any of these strategies and improved SAT scores.

These strategies, in order according to those used most commonly by the contributing schools, are summarized below, and their frequency of use by all contributing systems can be found in Table 1. The table is followed by a list of the participating systems and their contact persons.

1) SAT preparation courses/tutorials and SAT preparation software packages

Nearly all systems reporting indicated that SAT preparation courses or tutorials were available to their students during the school day (as an academic elective), before or after school, or on Saturdays. This is the most common short-term practice for improving SAT scores. These tutorial sessions and/or courses provide students with information on test format and test-taking strategies, experience in taking SAT practice tests, and, in some schools, an adult mentor/tutor who volunteers to work with a small group of students on a regular basis. Additionally, the tutorial sessions typically include the use of materials provided by commercial companies, such as Kaplan and Stanford. These SAT tutorials and classes vary in their degree of intensity, length, and cost. Some systems were able to integrate the SAT preparation activities into the existing schedule and curriculum, while others, like Camden County, implemented a full-scale Saturday program held during the summer months, as well as during the regular school year.

Most systems also indicated that they provided their students with SAT preparation software packages that teach test-taking strategies and allow students to take actual SAT practice tests on the computer. One system even requires seniors to complete a minimum number of hours in their SAT computer lab working with this software. Some systems take advantage of SAT preparation materials available on-line through a variety of websites.

2) Improved curriculum

Most systems also indicated that the most important long-term strategy to increase SAT scores has been to improve their curriculum. Some systems mentioned that they had added courses, such as Reading and Reasoning and SAT Mathematics, that helped prepare students for the SAT. Other systems indicated that they had curriculum articulation at all levels (elementary, middle, and high) so that students were coming to high school better prepared. Others emphasized that they had aligned their high school curriculum with the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), the SAT, and state-mandated tests at all grade levels. The national literature also emphasizes that the greatest long-term effects on SAT scores comes from increasing academic expectations at all grade levels and adding rigor to the curriculum.

3) Emphasis on vocabulary, writing, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills

Many systems reported that they had improved their curriculum more specifically by placing an increased emphasis on skills needed for success on the SAT, such as vocabulary, writing, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills. For example, in Carroll County, students are provided with a writing lab, through which writing skills are emphasized, and in Camden County, both faculty and students are involved in the SAT preparation process with their “SAT Question of the Day.”

4) Parental awareness of the PSAT/SAT

Several systems have focused on ensuring that parents are aware of Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) and SAT activities and the importance of the PSAT/SAT. This is particularly important for the systems offering SAT courses and preparation software because it is almost always voluntary, requiring time after school or on Saturday for students. For example, one school provides information on the PSAT to parents of 8th graders, while others meet with high school parents to inform them of testing dates, preparation options, and the availability of the PSAT and its relationship to the SAT.

5) Staff development on the PSAT/SAT and instructional improvement strategies

Teachers in several systems have used their staff development resources as a means of receiving training on the content of the PSAT, how to prepare students for it, and the utilization of PSAT summary reports for the identification of students' strengths and weaknesses. Other staff development activities considered by many systems to be important in the

SAT improvement process include those focusing on teaching strategies that promote active learning and test item analysis.

6) Provision of guidance counseling on the PSAT/SAT

Systems indicated that guidance counselors provide a variety of services to students concerning the PSAT/SAT. They advise students on the importance of SAT preparation, the appropriate courses to take in preparation for the SAT, and the optimal time in their high school career to take the SAT. They also help students interpret their PSAT/SAT results and analyze them for strengths and weaknesses.

7) Provision and analysis of PSAT/SAT data at the individual level

Systems indicated that they provided students with their PSAT/SAT answer summaries, and helped the students analyze these summaries to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, guidance counselors and teachers perform this service, while in other cases this analysis occurs in the SAT preparation courses and/or tutorial sessions.

8) Provision and analysis of PSAT/SAT data and other pertinent assessment data at the school level

Several systems reported that they analyzed PSAT/SAT results for the school. For example, in Cherokee County, high school department heads analyze their PSAT results to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses, and in Clayton County, representatives from all elementary, middle, and high schools meet to analyze the high schools' PSAT results so that elementary and middle schools can help prepare students for the SAT.

9) Increased number of students taking the PSAT

Given that the PSAT serves as a practice SAT and provides valuable information to students, such as identification of strengths and weaknesses and experience with the SAT format, some systems have focused on increasing the number of students who take the PSAT. National research supports this strategy, as it indicates that taking the PSAT increases students' performance on the SAT. This is the reason that the GDOE requests legislative funding to provide 10th graders these tests for free. Some schools focus on improving awareness of PSAT testing dates, while others have found imaginative ways to encourage students to take the PSAT. In at least one system, 9th and 11th grade students may take the PSAT at no charge.

10) Emphasis on increasing the number of students taking higher level courses

Several systems reported that they have emphasized the importance of taking higher level courses, and are seeing an increased number of students taking higher level courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and college preparation classes. This reinforces the second most mentioned strategy of increasing expectations and increasing the rigor of the curriculum.

11) Block scheduling

A few systems felt that the move to block scheduling had assisted in improving SAT scores, as they believed it increased achievement in general and gave students the opportunity to enroll in additional academic electives.

12) Emphasis on ensuring that students have taken the appropriate courses before taking the SAT

Some systems have emphasized the importance of taking courses that help in preparation for the SAT, such as Geometry and Algebra, before taking the SAT. Again, a more specific emphasis is being placed on “raising the bar” for all students and improving curricular choices made by students.

Table 1. Actions to Which Systems Attribute Their Improved SAT Scores – There is a separate link for Table 1

System Contacts for SAT Promising Practices and Participating Schools

Please contact the following system representatives if you are interested in learning more about systemwide or school SAT improvement activities in this publication or if you would like to visit one of the schools.

Camden County

Ms. Linda Williams
SAT Coach - Camden County High School
(912) 729 -7318
mrssatcoach@hotmail.com

Camden County High School
Mr. Authur VanBlarcum, Principal

Carroll County

Ms. Diana Henson
(770) 832 -3568
dhenson@carroll.k12.ga.us

Bowdon High School
Mr. Chuck Taylor, Principal

Mount Zion High School
Mr. David Butler, Principal

Cherokee County

Dr. Janice Hamrick
System Testing Supervisor
(770) 479 -1871

Cherokee County High School
Mr. Bill Sebring, Principal

Sequoyah High School
Mrs. Doe Kirkland, Principal

Clayton County

Dr. Ray Blakely
System Test Coordinator
(404) 608 -2549

Jonesboro High School
Mrs. Linda Tanner, Principal

Lovejoy High School
Mrs. Evelyn Florin, Principal

Gwinnett County

Ms. Linda Mitchell
System Test Coordinator
(770) 513 -6641

Central Gwinnett High School
Dr. Charles Buchanan, Principal

Collins Hill High School
Mr. Coley Krug, Principal

Duluth High School
Dr. Ted Neuman, Principal

North Gwinnett High School
Dr. John Green, Principal

Phoenix High School
Ms. Marion Campbell, Principal

Hall County

Mr. Don Hall
North Hall High School
(770) 983 -7331

Johnson High School
Ms. Sandra Edwards, Principal

North Hall High School
Mr. John Corley, Principal

Johnson County

Ms. Grace Moore
Ms. Glenda Holmes
(912) 864 -2222
jcboe@johnson.k12.ga.us

Johnson County High School
Mr. C. Roland Thomas, Principal

Marietta City Schools

Mr. Kelly Henson
Associate Superintendent
(770) 422 -3500
khenson@marietta_city.k12.ga.us

Marietta High School
Mr. Gordon Pritz, Principal

McIntosh County

Dr. David Franks
Principal, McIntosh County Academy
(912) 437-6691

McIntosh County Academy
Dr. David Franks, Principal

Richmond County

Dr. Virginia Bradshaw
Asst. Superintendent
(706) 481-1646

Academy of Richmond County Comprehensive High School
Mr. David D. Smith, Principal

Josey High School
Dr. Vivian Pennamon, Principal

Westside High School
Mr. David H. Smith, Principal

System and Individual School Practices

The following are practices submitted by participating systems and the schools in their systems that have improved their SAT scores consistently over the last three years. The reader will note that there are many more practices, strategies, and activities than the twelve that appear on the chart of most commonly used practices. What follows gives a much richer picture of the kind and variety of SAT improvement plans being implemented in this sample of Georgia schools. These practices also appear more or less as they were submitted to DOE. A minimum of editing was done, so the reader will find differences in the styles and approaches to reporting strategies. Again, feel free to contact the system representatives for more details or to visit the system or one of the schools.

Camden County

The four factors listed below characterize Camden County's efforts to improve SAT scores.

- **Implementation of camp SAT classes.** As soon as the state provided software from Scholastic Testing Systems (STS; formerly Stanford Testing Systems), SAT Preparation classes were organized. First attempts included Saturday morning training sessions with relatively small participation; now summer sessions are held just before school begins and afternoon sessions are held before each administration of the SAT (four times each year). In the academic year 1999 -2000, over 200 students participated in the camps. The response from students has been very positive. Most camps have required two teachers for all sessions, and the pre-school camp even required three teachers for the morning session. Camden's first 1600 SAT score came from a student in one of the early camps that took several practice tests and carefully reworked all wrong answers. Several students have raised their scores 150+ points; many have raised scores by 100 points. The experience has been that students who are willing to work diligently have no difficulty raising their scores by at least 100 points.
- **Teacher training.** Last summer, after Camden partnered with STS at their request, three teachers – two English teachers and one mathematics teacher – were sent to receive training at a three-day workshop in Atlanta. Training was sponsored by STS, but the training experts did not primarily use software to teach SAT skills; they also used more traditional classroom approaches. Camden teachers continue to sample the SAT materials on the market and to hone and perfect their skills to find more ways to re-teach test concepts.
- **Schoolwide awareness.** A "SAT Question-of-the-Day" is placed on the daily bulletin as a way to involve more of the faculty and student body in the process of preparing for the SAT. Materials and concepts are shared with

faculty who did not attend the training. All 10th grade mathematics and English teachers are responsible for some PSAT preparation, since the state has been paying for students at that grade level to take the test. Additionally, potential Duke Talent Search 7th graders were invited to participate in the camps, and a limited number of those students took this opportunity.

- **Appointment of an SAT coach.** The SAT coach coordinates overall improvement efforts. These efforts include sending out newspaper and radio publicity about the SAT camps offered in Camden County, as well as making all announcements and arrangements for the camps within the school. The coach also corresponds with students and parents on-line to assist with the SAT coaching process. This coach receives a coaching supplement that funds teaching time in the camps.

Carroll County

Faculty and guidance staff members in Carroll County believe that their improving SAT scores can be attributed to the following.

- SAT preparation courses
- Improved advisement
- More classes in core content areas
- High reading level of students due to effective programs in feeder schools
- Test-taking skills being taught
- Increased number of students taking the PSAT
- Increased number of students taking AP courses
- AP classes in language arts
- Emphasis placed on writing skills through the writing lab
- Increased number of students taking college preparation classes particularly in mathematics
- Emphasis placed on vocabulary in language arts classes
- More resources available to students at home, such as the internet

Cherokee County

The SAT average score in Cherokee County increased 30 points from 1995 to 1997 and 20 points from 1997 to 1999. The following practices and strategies have contributed to these significant gains in Cherokee County SAT scores.

- Counselors have provided guidance sessions to 10th grade students on the format of the SAT and the importance of test preparation. Practice tests have been utilized within classes.
- The PSAT was administered to tenth grade students in the fall of 1998 and 1999. This gave students a better understanding of the content and format of the SAT.

- Meetings have been held with parents to explain the PSAT reports and its relationship to the SAT. The individual test reports which students/parents received gave them a better understanding of the content of the SAT and the information that students need to know to be prepared for college.
- Students have been encouraged to take higher level math, science and social studies courses. They have been advised to take courses assessed on the SAT, e.g., Geometry, before taking the SAT.
- Department heads from each high school have participated in statewide training on the utilization of the PSAT reports. Department heads have provided training to teachers within each department on the utilization of the reports in planning instruction.
- Each department has conducted item analyses of their respective School Summary of Answer Reports to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses. Strategies have been planned within each department for improving performance on the PSAT and SAT.
- There has been an over-all focus within all departments in each school to improve critical reading skills, verbal reasoning, math problem solving and writing skills.
- A Reading and Reasoning course has been implemented at each high school.
- Teachers have analyzed curricular materials to assure the content on the SAT is covered within courses.
- SAT Prep courses have been made available to students.
- Cherokee County is focusing on vertical alignment between elementary, middle and high school levels in the implementation of advanced programs.
- The System is identifying students at the elementary level who would benefit from advanced programs and introducing advanced programs earlier.

In addition to the above strategies, the following intervention strategies and policies have been implemented in the last year which are expected to significantly impact student achievement in Cherokee County this year and the succeeding years:

- The new “Educational Accountability and School Improvement Policy” Includes Major System Priorities, School Advisory Councils (SAC), School Improvement Plans (SIP) at every Cherokee County Public School and annual Customer Surveys.
- The Pupil Progression Policy initiated the process of establishing more rigorous standards for student achievement and new assessment systems to measure progress toward the standards in each subject and grade level.
- Rigorous standards, critical course content, essential teacher knowledge and assessment systems are being developed for each subject and grade level. Initial implementation for elementary schools is scheduled for August 2000 and for middle and high schools in August 2001.
- The school system will publish this year for the first time a long-term District Strategic Plan that will monitor progress toward successful implementation of

the School Board's Major System Priorities. The Plan will also contain an evaluation component relative to each of the major changes that have occurred within the School System.

- Established the Office of School Operations and the Office of Accountability, Technology and Strategic Planning - These offices were established to ensure effective school operations, student learning and accountability.
- Established a position of Advanced Academics/Grants Management Supervision. This position was established to increase competitive grant funding and to ensure vertical alignment of advanced programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels.
- Instructional and technological support will be provided to help teachers successfully integrate technology into the curriculum at all grade levels.
- School and System professional development will be based on School Improvement Plans (SIP) and will be tied to student achievement and identified teacher deficits in essential knowledge needed to help students master critical course content.

Clayton County

Listed below are some of the strategies that are used in Clayton County Public Schools that might impact students' scores on the SAT.

- Several SAT preparation software packages are used in tutorial sessions. All of the schools' tutorials – some before and some after school – are designed for students to use the software to detect areas of weakness and then work to strengthen those areas. One school has enlisted a civic group that works with students during Saturday sessions.
- In addition to the 10th graders whose testing is funded by the state, all 8th grade Algebra I students, 9th graders, and selected 11th graders take the PSAT using local funds. Taking the PSAT provides additional testing experience as well as valuable information from the Summary of Answers provided by PSAT administrators.
- Schools have a plan by which students review their PSAT Summary of Answers results with a teacher or counselor.
- Beginning this year, all 10th and 11th grade PSAT students were provided with a document describing the Freshman Index and calculating each student's estimated Index using their GPA and PSAT score. The hope is that seeing their Index (and how it compares with the average Freshman Index of entering freshmen at all Georgia public colleges) will further encourage students to apply themselves to their academic work as well as increase participation in the SAT preparation programs.
- For several years, representatives from all schools have met together to analyze the results of the high schools' PSAT Summary of Answers. By knowing the areas of weakness as shown by the PSAT, the expectation is

that the elementary and middle schools can help prepare students for their SAT experience.

- Counselors work with students in interpreting their PSAT and SAT information as well as help the students decide on the optimum time in their high school career to take the SAT.
- Information concerning preparing for the SAT is supplied to parents of 8th graders in the High School Planning Guide.

Gwinnett County

Gwinnett County Public Schools has a mission that focuses on improving student achievement as measured against local, national, and world class standards. To that end, Gwinnett County has focused its resources on providing a quality education grounded in high expectations for every student. While each school may have local programs that improve performance on the SAT, the underlying programs that support improved achievement in our schools over the last five years include the following:

- A strong, focused curriculum, our Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS), that was developed by educators and endorsed by the community
- Community support for a strong curriculum that promotes higher order thinking skills measured by the SAT
- Correlation of the AKS to the QCC and testing instruments such as the SAT, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), and Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT)
- Implementation of a Results-Based Evaluation System that uses improvement of student achievement as the primary focus of school accountability
- Comprehensive staff development that requires a minimum of 20 hours for each staff member related to teaching and learning
- Implementation of Literacy Standards that promote ongoing achievement in reading and writing
- Reading specialists added to each middle and high school
- Core materials selected to support the curriculum
- Community school classes that students can attend to enhance test-taking strategies
- SAT preparation software provided for each school's technology labs
- Implementation of standardized end-of-semester exams for all high school courses.

Hall County

The strategies employed at North Hall High School to increase SAT scores are as follows:

- Providing an SAT preparation course that is taught before and after school
- Encouraging students to take the SAT early and often
- Targeting juniors for the receipt of specific help in the areas of mathematics and language arts.

North Hall High School adopted block scheduling three years ago and personnel believe that it has had a positive influence on test scores and overall academic achievement.

North Hall High School is committed to continuing to assist students in improving their achievement on standard assessments. Other techniques that might assist students in test taking will be studied this summer.

Johnson County

There are several interventions that personnel at Johnson County believe have contributed to their increased SAT scores. An SAT preparation course is offered every year, and SAT software provided by the state (Scholastic Testing Systems [STS] formerly Stanford Testing Systems) was used in those courses up until this year, as the license agreement was not renewed. Several teachers attended a PSAT workshop, which provided them with information on the content of the PSAT and how to prepare students for it. Additionally, Johnson County has recently switched to 4 X 4 block scheduling, and four years ago restructured their curriculum at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Marietta City

Marietta City School System requires that each school have a test-use plan to improve the performance of students on standardized tests. Plans may differ depending on the needs of the particular school population or the goals set for each school based on its school improvement plan.

- The district, this year, fully funded the Kaplan SAT preparation program for any junior or senior who had at least a 2.0 GPA and wished to participate. A total of 100 students took part in this initiative.
- In addition, the Community School provides SAT preparation classes for those students who wish to attend in the evening. During the regular school day, the high school also offers SAT preparation classes for students.
- One program that has helped with testing has been the required course for all 9th graders entitled "Study Skills". In this course, emphasis is placed on test taking skills and ways to lessen the anxiety associated with standardized tests.
- Several elementary schools provide special classes on Saturday to help students practice taking a variety of tests in a more relaxed and positive manner. Test readiness and test familiarity are keys to success, and each school attends to this need.

Marietta City Schools also considers its extensive preparations for the GHSGT to be instrumental in improving achievement on the SAT.

- Data from the GHSGT is disaggregated to determine precisely which students failed and the sections of the test that were most problematic. Also, the data are disaggregated to allow a focus on the particular objectives in each section of the test that presented the most difficulty to students. Appropriate instructional changes are then made based on these data.
- A comprehensive list of the GHSGT objectives is given to all appropriate departments. All teachers in their departments are made aware of these objectives and include them in their instructional plans.
- Practice tests are developed/obtained and administered to students in the fall of their junior year before their first opportunity to take the GHSGT.
- Students that score poorly on one or more sections of the practice test should receive remedial opportunities to take the GHSGT.
- A packet of test preparation material is given to each student.
- Testing conditions are examined to make sure that students have the best possible test-taking environment.
- Upon receiving the spring administration scores of the GHSGT, students not passing one or more sections are immediately notified of their score and about the summer remedial program and all other GHSGT remedial opportunities.

- The summer remedial program for GHSGT will be restructured. Besides working with students in mathematics and language arts, trained science and social studies teachers are needed to work with students in these areas.
- Students failing the GHSGT in the spring are to be assigned to one block of GHSGT remediation in their fall schedule. Appropriate staff development is provided to the teachers of these courses. These courses should emphasize specific GHSGT objectives and are scheduled according to the portions failed by students.
- The Coordinator of Secondary Instruction will contact the GDOE regarding resources to assist in SAT improvement efforts. The coordinator will provide this information to the high school on a timely basis.
- GHSGT coordinators are responsible for working with central office personnel to carry out the efforts outlined in this plan.
- The Coordinator of Secondary Instruction will contact other metro school systems concerning their GHSGT remediation efforts. This information will be provided to Marietta High School on a timely basis.
- Seniors who have failed the GHSGT several times and are approaching their last opportunity to pass the test before their scheduled graduation are given special remedial efforts. With teachers' permissions, these students may be pulled from certain non-academic subjects to focus on GHSGT remediation.
- GHSGT skills and objectives are introduced to students in the required 9th grade study skills course.
- Because science and social studies scores are particularly troublesome, special remedial efforts in those subject areas are being developed.
- The Community Schools program will develop and implement a GHSGT remedial class to be offered at no cost to Marietta City students.
- When a student takes the GHSGT for the first time, and fails one or more sections, this student will have parking and participation in extracurricular activities privileges suspended. The privileges will be reinstated upon the student and parent signing an individualized GHSGT remediation plan. The privileges may be suspended at a future date if the student fails to carry out the agreed-upon activities in the plan.

McIntosh County

The following information indicates the various strategies employed by McIntosh County to increase SAT scores:

- A planned program of SAT preparation through the use of classes during the instructional day; before and after school tutorial opportunities; on-line enrichment and Stanford SAT Preparation materials (now known as Scholastic Testing Systems).
- Analysis of testing information to determine curriculum deficiencies/gaps; modifications in adopted instructional programs through the use of

supplementary materials and multi-sensory strategies, and use of technology (graphing calculators) to supplement instruction.

- Use of a 4 X 4-block schedule organizational structure that allows students the opportunity and flexibility to enroll in additional electives, including repeating advanced courses to improve upon their knowledge attainment.
- A school climate based on an effective multi-level discipline code; small pupil - teacher ratios; more individual attention, resulting from a small school size; recognition and reward for excellence; high expectations for academic and character performance; and continuous communication with community and parents on achievements and expectations.

Richmond County

System and school initiatives implemented in Richmond County to improve SAT scores are described below.

System Initiatives

- **Required SAT lab.** Each senior is expected to complete a minimum of 10-20 hours in the SAT computer lab using the *Stanford Study Guide for SAT Success* (from Scholastic Testing Systems -STS; formerly Stanford Testing Systems) Each school submits a monthly report to the Richmond County Superintendent of Schools. The report lists each student by name and the number of hours each student has spent in the lab. The Superintendent meets with high school principals and central office instructional personnel following the submission of each report.
- **QCC alignment guides.** Each 9-12 course guide correlates the Georgia QCC objectives and the GHSGT objectives with Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.
- **AP courses.** Each high school offers AP courses. Each school is committed to increasing student participation in AP courses. The district has increased its pool of trained AP teachers from 25 to 51 over the last two years.
- **District level instructional meetings.** Subject area coordinators hold scheduled meetings with high school department chairpersons. Preparing teachers and students for successful achievement is the focus of these instructional meetings. District level instructional personnel, including the assistant superintendent for instruction, instructional directors, and subject area coordinators, hold scheduled meetings with principals, assistant principals, department chairpersons, and guidance counselors.

Richmond County strongly recommends that every student taking the SAT should have completed the following:

1. Taken the PSAT
2. Logged in 10-20 hours of preparation time with an Advocate Advisor and conferred with that advisor prior to taking the test

3. Completed Algebra I, Geometry, four semesters of English, two laboratory Sciences, Civics and World History.

Westside High School

The actions taken at Westside High School to improve SAT scores include the following:

- Teachers have used *Mastering the Verbal PSAT/SAT* and *Mastering the Math PSAT/SAT* books while preparing students in class.
- The Stanford SAT program (now known as Scholastic Testing Systems). is offered with a pretest and students spend at least 12 hours on this program while in school.
- The English teacher works with students on writing and vocabulary every Tuesday. A mathematics teacher does the same every Monday.

Academy of Richmond County

The actions taken at the Academy of Richmond County to improve SAT scores include the following:

- The “Word of the Day,” was implemented, in which SAT “Hot Words” are given during daily announcements, with spelling, meaning and sentence usage.
- The “Wednesday Analogy,” was implemented, in which teachers in all classes give students five analogy problems to complete at 10 a.m. every Wednesday.
- Students who have signed up for the SAT are given a list of websites for SAT preparation.
- Students who have registered for the SAT are scheduled to take the SAT pretest and are placed in the SAT lab for a minimum of 15 hours preceding the test date.
- All computers have SAT practice software and they are available for student use before and after school and with elective teacher permission.
- Teachers have been scheduled to work on a practice SAT in the computer lab to review their own skills.
- Language arts teachers have divided a list of 1000 words identified by the Educational Testing Service as words often missed on tests to be used with specific grade levels.
- Copies of *Mastering the Verbal PSAT/SAT* and *Mastering the Math PSAT/SAT* by Larry Krieger were purchased for all language arts and mathematics teachers.
- Four teachers attended a workshop by Larry Krieger and returned to school and shared with the staff.
- A teacher-made crossword puzzle is available using words from Krieger’s “Golden Dozen.”

T. W. Josey Comprehensive High School

The actions taken at the T.W. Josey Comprehensive High School to improve SAT scores include the following:

- Students are given an actual SAT from the book *Ten Real SAT's* in a mock setting.
- Scheduled class time is allowed for students to use the SAT lab.
- The computer lab is open before school, during lunch, and after school.
- After-school tutoring is provided for individual students in mathematics and language arts.
- The word of the day is posted around the school throughout the year.
- A pep session is held before each test to discuss tips and to boost confidence.
- Sample SAT mathematics problems are reviewed and discussed.
- Students participate in the Math Bowl.
- Language arts teachers focus on teaching prefixes, root words, meaning and vocabulary decoding.
- Students are shown how to use a thesaurus using vocabulary words.
- Crossword puzzles are developed using the words of the day.
- Vocabulary words are used in teaching, especially in the area of literature. The students are able to “see” how words connect.
- Outside reading is encouraged, especially *The New Yorker* magazine.
- Teachers develop vocabulary tests that include items such as sentence completions and analogies.
- Teachers teach from multiple texts and material.
- The importance of reading is emphasized.
- Students play word games using vocabulary from a story, poem, play and/or words of the day.

Georgia Statewide SAT Improvement Initiatives

There are a number of statewide initiatives that are designed, among other things, to help improve SAT scores of students across Georgia. These initiatives are highlighted here because they conform to the accepted national research literature that suggests that the most effective ways to improve SAT scores in the long term is to increase expectations and raise standards. This strategy also requires an effective accountability system that can also serve as a diagnostic tool.

Curriculum: Nationally the most accepted strategy for improving achievement on all assessments, including the SAT, is to raise standards and increase the rigor of the curriculum.

QCC – The QCC is the foundation for meeting the need for higher standards and rigor in Georgia, setting standards for what must be learned and the level at which that learning must take place. The state delivery system for the QCC is “Georgia Learning Connections (GLC).” This web-based initiative is a one-stop curriculum-building resource for all educators. GLC provides on-line multiple resources to ensure that the QCC remains a “living” document that impacts teaching and learning every school day.

AP Courses – Experience and literature from across the nation indicates that the students who take higher level courses do better on the SAT. To encourage participation in AP courses, Georgia pays for AP exams taken by Georgia students.

Georgia also has a U.S. Department of Education grant this year for five Georgia high schools to encourage low-income students to participate in the AP program. This grant provides a partial salary for an AP teacher, funds for AP curriculum materials, and funds for participation in several College Board training programs. Over the next two years this number will expand to 15 schools. These schools will receive intensive training in implementing a more rigorous curriculum through the AP program. These schools will serve as models for replication statewide.

In addition, Georgia has entered into a consortium with South Carolina and Tennessee, in cooperation with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), that is intended to promote greater access to AP courses for low-income students to assure that all students have the opportunity to be educated to their maximum capabilities. This project will (1) increase the number of low-income students enrolled in AP courses, (2) increase the participation of low-income students in AP exams, and (3) increase the availability of AP courses in schools serving areas with high poverty levels.

PSAT and Summary of Answers – National studies indicate that students who take the PSAT score higher on the SAT. Georgia pays for all 10th graders to take the PSAT and provides the Summary of Answers to all school systems. The Summary of Answers is an analysis of performance on the PSAT by subject area content and curriculum objectives for use by local schools, systems, and the Georgia Department of Education. Statewide activities include not only purchase and administration of the PSAT, but also statewide technical assistance targeted to system and local school personnel. The technical assistance provides information and skills necessary to interpret and utilize PSAT results to address content objectives in which deficiencies and/or weaknesses occur in student performance.

Accountability: Because Georgia has “raised the bar” by making the statewide curriculum more explicit and more rigorous, there must be a state level assessment system to measure student achievement of these more powerful curricular expectations.

Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT): The Georgia CRCT is the lynchpin for the accountability system called for in the new educational reform legislation. Instruction is also supported by the CRCT through the diagnosis of individual student academic needs.

Conclusion

The strategies for improving achievement on the SAT described in this publication include a variety of approaches. Some, such as providing SAT preparation classes for students, are short-term approaches and are relatively easy to implement. Others, such as raising academic standards for students, increasing the rigor of the curriculum, encouraging students to take higher-level courses, and preparing them for those courses, are more long-term approaches that may be more difficult to implement. However, national research indicates that these long-term strategies are not only the most successful in raising SAT scores, but are also the most successful in raising student achievement in general. Consequently, when planning your educational efforts, educators are encouraged to consider both the short and long term improvement strategies sampled here.