

The Pendulum Has Swung Back: Standardized Testing Is Again a Core Requirement in College Admissions

Harvard, Yale, MIT, Stanford, Dartmouth, Brown, Cornell, Georgetown, and Caltech have reinstated SAT and ACT requirements; Princeton will follow for 2027-28.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The college admissions landscape has undergone a decisive reset. Leading universities across the U.S. have reinstated SAT and ACT requirements, and standardized testing is once again a mandatory component of competitive college applications. The test-optional era — a temporary accommodation to pandemic disruption — is over.



Eric Gutman, Founder & CEO

The Data, Not Ideology, Drove the Reversal

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MIT acted first. In March 2022, MIT's Dean of Admissions, Stuart Schmill, announced the reinstatement, announcing that the school's internal research showed its ability to accurately predict student academic success had been significantly improved by considering standardized testing alongside other factors — and that this held true across all demographic and socioeconomic groups. Schmill was direct: without test scores, MIT lacked sufficient

information to confidently evaluate applicants from under-resourced schools. The tests, he

noted, were not a barrier — they were a tool for identifying talent that grades alone could miss.

Dartmouth followed in February 2024, guided by research conducted by its own economics and sociology faculty. As President Sian Leah Beilock wrote to the Dartmouth community, the data showed that standardized test scores were an important predictor of success at Dartmouth regardless of a student's background or income — and that in a test-optional environment, the admissions department was unintentionally overlooking high-potential applicants. Harvard, Brown, Cornell, Georgetown, and Caltech all reinstated their requirements in 2024. Stanford, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Miami followed in 2025. The Ohio State University reinstated the ACT/SAT requirement for all new first-year undergraduate applicants to its Columbus campus, effective the 2026 admissions cycle, with its provost stating that students who submit test scores show stronger academic outcomes.

Yale has adopted a test-flexible policy — applicants must submit scores, but may choose from the SAT, ACT, AP exams, or IB exams. Princeton will require SAT or ACT scores beginning with the 2027–28 admissions cycle, ending a seven-year test-optional period — making it the seventh Ivy League school to return to required testing, with only Columbia remaining test-optional.

"These institutions didn't bring testing back because it was fashionable," notes Eric Gutman, Founder and CEO of [The Best Test Prep](#), a New York-based firm. "They brought it back because their own research demanded it; numbers don't lie. Harvard and Dartmouth arrived at the same conclusion independently."

What This Means for Applicants

For students targeting selective colleges, submitting a strong SAT or ACT score is no longer a differentiator — it's a requirement. At universities such as Stanford and across the Ivy League, an application without competitive scores is incomplete.

Standardized tests offer a reliable, universal measure of students' reasoning and problem-solving abilities under timed conditions. That comparability is precisely what admissions offices need — and why, after years of operating without it, they moved to restore it.

"Standardized tests provide a level playing field for apples to apples comparisons between applicants," Gutman explains. "Admissions officers can use them to compare students from all different geographic regions and educational backgrounds. As opposed to personal statements, the exams are also purely their work, and with serious preparation, one of the most improvable parts of any application."

Prepare Accordingly

The test-optional window has closed at America's most elite schools, so students who treat standardized tests as an afterthought do so at their own disadvantage. Those who prepare seriously have a measurable, demonstrable edge in a competitive admission environment.

About The Best Test Prep

Founded by Eric Gutman, The Best Test Prep is a New York City-based education firm that has been serving students since 2014. The company provides expert instruction for major standardized exams, including the SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, ISEE, SSAT, and SHSAT. Its methodology is built on more than a decade of experience helping students improve performance across a wide range of academic levels.

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