

# Because You SAT Down and ACTed

## The pros and cons of standardized tests

BY NEHA SHABEER, SOPHOMORE,  
ASHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

While the Class of 2017 has recently concluded many stress-filled days of SAT preparation, campus tours and college applications, the Class of 2018 is now beginning the anxiety-ridden process of standardized testing—the SAT I, SAT II (subject tests) and ACT.

### Background

The SAT I Reasoning Test, formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, was created in 1926 by a nonprofit group of universities and other educational organizations called the College Board. The purpose of creating the SAT was to have a standard exam for universities to assess college-bound seniors creating a classless meritocracy for college acceptance (Time Magazine). The SAT II: Subject Test, formerly known as Achievement Tests, was founded in 1937 by the College Board for colleges to consider students' strengths in select subjects (Time). The SAT's counterpart, the ACT, formerly known as the American College Testing, was created in 1959 as competition for the SAT's two-decade long monopoly on college entrance tests.

With the implementation of the new SAT in March 2016,

more schools have been scrutinizing their testing policies.

### Pros

Today, the SAT is considered more prestigious and more widely accepted in colleges on the two coasts, while the ACT has its niche in Southern and Midwestern schools (Time). According to the College Board and ACT, over 1.9 million students in the Class of 2015 took the ACT and 1.7 million students took the SAT. The pros of such assessments are that they combat high school grade inflation in college admissions, keep students and schools accountable, are objectively graded, provide school data for federal grants, and supply data within sub-groups. The thought behind the exams is benevolent, but there are many flaws with its current structure.

### Cons

The SAT is very ineffective in factoring in personal circumstances since it is administered on the same day at the same time across the country. It does not account for students' progress, personal circumstances or socioeconomic background that might affect students' scores. The SAT Reasoning Test is only administered once a month between the months of October

and June and SAT II Subject Tests are only offered during specific months depending on the subject (College Board). Due to strict college application deadlines and cancellation fees, it is often not possible for students to reschedule test dates due to financial reasons or even mild sicknesses when one likely will not test their best.

For example, if a student is planning to take the SAT Biology M exam in January, but falls ill to a cold and wants to postpone the test, the next opportunity to take the test would be in May. Since one does not need to be on bed rest with a common cold, this student would most probably still take the exam even when they are not feeling their best leading to scores that do not best reflect their capabilities.

Additionally, as a timed test, the test favors quick, mediocre students rather than slow, brilliant students. There are many stories of students who slack in school that get high SAT scores and hard-working students in school who receive average scores (Washington Post). The rigid time constraint often causes SAT preparation to be about knowing the "tricks" of the test rather than understanding the actual material. This automatically gives students from a wealthier background that can invest in tutors and prep books such as the Princeton Review or Kaplan an advantage compared

to students from a low-income household. Furthermore, the SAT puts students in a pressurized environment that does not value skills, such as creativity, leadership, compassion, integrity, or persistence. Test expert and tutor at the Princeton Review, Edward Carroll, even said, "The SAT is a very flawed test if you expect it to reveal much about student content skill or personal study and performance ability."

### Students vs. Students

The use of the SAT to create national percentiles pits students against each other and causes them to try to outperform each other rather than working to do the best of their abilities. Students can receive good scores but still be unhappy due to their percentile rank. Factors students cannot control such as where they live matter as well! Juniors who take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in Massachusetts must get much higher scores to be in the running for the National Merit Scholarship than students in places like Wyoming that have lower mean scores (PrepScholar). This furthers the competitive aspect of the test rather than quantifying personal knowledge.

### Admission Anxiety

Although anxiety comes from taking the test, a lot of confusion and anxiety comes from how colleges use test scores while evaluating applications. With a surge in college applications in recent years caused by more jobs requiring higher education and students applying to more schools at a time, admissions officers are bombarded with applications to read (Forbes). Consequently, SAT scores are used as a quick, easy way to cut down the applicant pool and choose which applications to truly focus on. On the other hand, over 900 colleges and universities across the country have become test-optional or test-flexible by using high school GPA (grade point average), class rank, extracurricular activities, and community service instead of standardized test scores to evaluate students (FairTest). This diversifies the campus with minority and low-income students who usually do not perform as well on standardized testing and rewards diligent, hardworking students throughout their high school career (NPR). Examples of test-optional schools are Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Smith College, and George Washington University.

**SAT**

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## SAT

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## Stress on Schools

Regardless of these options, students, parents and high-ranking schools will inevitably keep putting stress on standardized tests. The common core curriculum in each state is different and due to President Obama's Every Student Succeeds Act, teachers need to teach material that ensures students' success on annual state-mandated benchmark exams (Department of Education (DOE)). Success on these tests promises funding from President Obama's Race to the Top program, so it is critical for individual schools and states as a whole to do well (CNN).

Therefore, teachers need to first focus on teaching state-mandated curriculum that often doesn't leave extra time to cover extra material. Unfortunately

this leaves many students in a lurch when common core isn't in line with topics on the SAT Subject Tests. For example, plant structure and animal behavior were taken out of the Massachusetts Biology curriculum but is a key topic on the SAT Biology E/M test, an important test for many students applying for science majors to show their interest and expertise in the subject (DOE, College Board). This leaves students who want to achieve high scores on a path of self-learning complex topics and again disadvantages students without resources to do so.

I personally believe the cons of standardized testing outweigh the pros. I look forward to witnessing the reform of college applications as the test-optional and test-flexible culture grows and becomes the norm. For more about the world through my eyes, keep reading my monthly column :)

## Irrigation Systems and Equipment Compliance

To maximize water conservation, the Town of Ashland is enforcing compliance policies associated with residents' irrigation systems.

On or before July 1, 2016, all irrigation systems shall be equipped with rain gauges and programmable timers set to operate the system within the hours allowed under section §270-5 as noted in link: <https://ecode360.com/13018247>.

On or before July 1, 2017, all existing irrigation systems shall be equipped with the following:

- A dedicated irrigation water meter.

- A backflow prevention device compliant with 310 CMR 22.22. [www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/service/regulations/310cmr22.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/service/regulations/310cmr22.pdf)

Please contact your irrigation company to assist you with compliance.

Should you have any questions, call the DPW at 508-881-0103 or email [dpw@ashlandmass.com](mailto:dpw@ashlandmass.com). If you leave a message, please provide your phone number so we can return your call. For more information, visit [www.ashlandmass.com/469/Irrigation-Systems](http://www.ashlandmass.com/469/Irrigation-Systems).

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## Could You Be Leaving Untapped Money in Your Home?

By MIKE NICHOLSON,  
OWNER,  
NICHOLSON PLUMBING,  
HEATING, AIR CONDITIONING

If you are a Massachusetts resident, you may not be aware that there is a program available that will help you save on energy related costs and reduce the amount of energy that is expended in the Bay State. Called Mass Save, this initiative is sponsored by Massachusetts' natural gas and electric utilities, along with energy efficiency service providers.

For MetroWest homeowners, Mass Save offers information on home energy assessments and how to choose the best energy efficient lighting and appliances available. The home energy assessments are free of charge and include a personalized report with a number of recommendations.

Another component of the no-cost home energy assess-

ment is a custom home energy report that includes all rebates and incentives that are available for homeowners. The rebates include savings on a number of items for your home, including appliances, boilers, heat pumps, furnaces, air-conditioning, water heaters and more.

Mass Save offers generous programs for customers who may not have income to pay for home upgrades in the MetroWest area to lower their energy costs. Massachusetts residents can also apply for 0% loans for up to \$25,000 with payment plans up to seven years through the Mass Save HEAT Loan Program.

Generous rebates of up to \$3,500 are available for replacing aging, functional, inefficient heating and cooling equipment. The savings include:

- **Natural Gas Furnaces and Boilers:** Up to \$3,500
- **Propane Furnaces and Boilers:** Up to \$3,500

- **Oil Furnaces and Boilers:** Up to \$1,900
- **Electric Heat Pumps and A/C:** Up to \$1,000
- **Water Heaters:** Up to \$800

You can find the complete list of rebates that are available at [www.masssave.com](http://www.masssave.com).

The Mass Save program has been a great addition for Massachusetts residents looking for ways to increase their energy efficiency and update their home heating and cooling systems. Rebates, incentives and financing mean that taking advantage of Mass Save is an easy decision for homeowners in the MetroWest area.

Contact Mike Nicholson of Nicholson Plumbing, Heating, Air Conditioning for more information about the Mass Save Program at (508) 881-1500 or visit [www.nicholson-hvac.com](http://www.nicholson-hvac.com).



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# We Will Never Forget: A Tribute to Peach

BY NEHA SHABEER, SOPHOMORE,  
ASHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

On the quiet night of February 27, everything changed. The Ashland community lost a son, neighbor, friend, classmate, student, teammate and club member. While each person feels the loss of Brendan Petry in different way, one sentiment was felt by all: unity. Our entire community came together to support one another and the Petry family during the vigil at St. Bridget's Parish, visitation at Matarese Funeral Home, funeral service at St. Bridget's Parish, and for every difficult moment in between.

Words cannot even begin to describe how proud I am of how our community connected, teachers, students, parents and complete strangers. The strength and tenacity of our town was showcased through the therapy dogs that provided solace to so many students, the understanding of teachers, the team of Clockers on social media, and private phone calls between friends. The efforts to honor Brendan at Ashland High School (AHS) by endeavors such as Groufit Day (since he was known by his monochromatic gray fashion) and wearing peach ribbons have been outstanding.



The age-old saying is that you remember a person by how they made you feel and not by their individual accomplishments. Brendan was a star athlete on the AHS varsity soccer and basketball teams, a proud member of the Make-a-Wish club, the treasurer of the Spanish Club and an usher for the Theatrical Society, but he is remembered as a kind, hilarious and quirky guy who always had a smile on his face. With impassioned opinions and rallying ideas, Brendan was a kindred spirit that I'm so lucky to have known. Like his uncle, Bob Filippone, said, "We need more Brendan's in this world."

The following are memories from a few of Brendan's close friends from the sophomore class. "In my opinion, the most re-

markable trait Brendan possessed was his dedication. He had a work ethic like no one I've ever seen. If there was a club, he was part of it. If there was a team, he was part of it. If there was a discussion, he was part of it. He was so involved in our community, always giving back, and this is why he will be so dearly missed." *Alyssa Crouss*

"He did what he liked to do and was great at it. Seeing him always making a name for himself was a true inspiration to me. I hope to one day have the confidence and drive to success that Peach lived his life with." *Pratit Kadimdiwan*

"Petry was one in a million. Scratch that, he was one in a billion. I could always rely on those cheesy jokes that he knew everyone secretly loved, or him constantly asking if I was okay when he knew I was having a bad day. That's one of the reasons why this is so difficult: if Peach was here during a time like this, he would be tirelessly working to cheer everyone up, putting the needs of others in front of his own like he always did. He was truly a selfless person. His positive demeanor could instantly pull anyone out of a dark place. The kid genuinely cared about other peo-

ple, which is what made him so special. He would ask how your day was, and he actually wanted to hear about it. His sensitivity and empathy made him so easy to talk to. He was a good guy, and not a day will go by that I won't think of him." *Katie Tranguch*

I truly, truly hope and pray a tragedy like this will never strike Ashland again. Learn from Brendan's life and be a kinder person; you never know what troubles lay under a person's pristine exterior. Spread a smile, share a compliment, and make a joke—it could make all the difference in someone's life. Always remember there are so many people who care about you in this community and seek out help if you need it.

Rest in Peace, Brendan. We love and miss you.

## Ashland Mystery Festival New England Crime

**Friday, April 7**

**7 PM:** Mystery Film: A Boston-Based Courtroom Drama

mystery short story.

Sign up in advance: [aplace@ashlandmass.com](http://aplace@ashlandmass.com)

**Saturday, April 8**

**10 AM to Noon:** Writers Workshop with Leslie Wheeler, author of the Miranda Lewis mystery series

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**Authors' Panel & Book Sale**

**1 - 4 PM:** Ray Daniel, Hallie Ephron & Leslie Wheeler

Ashland Public Library,

For more information:

Call 508-881-0134



## Save These Dates!

**The Ashland Music Association's 4th Annual Mattress Sale Fundraiser,** Saturday, May 6, 10 am to 5 pm, at the Ashland Middle School Café. All proceeds will be used to purchase and repair Ashland Public School instruments. [ama@ashlandmusic.org](mailto:ama@ashlandmusic.org)

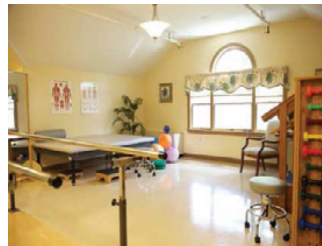
**Ashland Lions Golf Tournament** at the Highfields Golf and Country Club, Grafton, Monday, May 15. A day of golf, raffles, fun to support eye research and local charities. Sign up today! Contact Tom Heguy, [heguyt@comcast.net](mailto:heguyt@comcast.net), 508-881-1122, or Paul Ciccolo, [james146@comcast.net](mailto:james146@comcast.net), 508-881-2397.

**Write in the Wild: Writing Workshop** at Warren Woods on Saturday, May 20, 9:30 am to noon, led by writer Giulietta Nardone. Space is limited. Sign up by calling 508-380-8799 or emailing [giulietta@giuliettathemuse.com](mailto:giulietta@giuliettathemuse.com). Sponsored by the Board of Selectmen/BAA grant.

**Annual Meeting for Friends of the Ashland Library** at the library, Thursday, May 25, 7 to 8 pm. Light refreshments. Learn about the Friends' many programs. [www.friendsoftheapl.com](http://www.friendsoftheapl.com)



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