



February 29, 2016

Blake Morrison  
Reuters  
3 Times Square  
New York, NY 10036

Dear Mr. Morrison:

Thank you for taking the time to meet and for the opportunity to address some of the assumptions your reporting team has made about our test security efforts.

There is nothing more important to us than protecting the integrity of the SAT and ensuring the validity of the test scores we report.

When we've shared information publicly about the steps we take to protect the tests, we've found that it helps those who are trying to cheat and game the system. However, we're giving you more details now in order to correct some misinformation. We want to help you and your readers better understand the decisions we've made in collaboration with our members and Educational Testing Service (ETS). These decisions were made in the best interest of students and educators, with the best information we had available at the time.

When we met on Tuesday, you asked about three specific decisions. In each case, we considered a wide range of factors. To be clear, these decisions are never straightforward or easy. We have to evaluate the available evidence and balance the security of the exam with the needs of students and our members.

**Decision 1: June 2013 test security mitigation approach**

Up through June 2013, we'd seen security violations in countries such as South Korea, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. We were concerned that test content was not being adequately protected at test centers in these countries, which resulted in content being stolen. So, we decided to restrict the number of test administrations in these countries. We did not include China or Hong Kong because we had no evidence that they had incidents of test materials being stolen.

**Decision 2: Schedule for releasing redesigned assessments**

In December 2013, we made the decision to release our redesigned assessments in the 2015-16 school year. The new PSAT/NMSQT would be offered in the fall of 2015, followed by the release of the redesigned SAT in spring 2016. We heard clearly from our K12 members that it would be better for students to have the opportunity to take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall before the redesigned SAT. We also heard from our higher education members that they needed more time to prepare for the changes. This shift in the timing provided our higher education members two years to plan for the redesigned exam, familiarize themselves with changes, and meet system and publication requirements.

Before making this decision, we completed an analysis to confirm we could continue to handle the operations of the current SAT through January 2016. A key element in this analysis was ensuring we had sufficient SAT forms to meet the full range of administration needs – including international test dates – through January 2016.

A team of program experts, from the College Board and ETS, analyzed the test-form administration schedule according to the longstanding test administration criteria. They considered the full set of forms that had continued to be developed through December 2013, identified additional forms that could be pulled back into the pool that had been identified as PSAT/NMSQT “contingency” forms for the fall of 2016, and created an additional form from the pool of secure test items. As part of this analysis, the team weighed the risk of multiple pre-administration international security breaches for the same administration in a given year – a circumstance that has never happened in the College Board’s 100-year history. Ultimately the team determined that a sufficient number of test forms, including forms for backup testing, were available.

### **Decision 3: Cancellation of test administrations**

Two critical aspects of SAT test security are the approach we take in the days before the test and how we analyze the test results. Before each SAT administration, the College Board and ETS may receive anonymous tips alleging that versions of the test are for sale. We investigate all such reports.

If we discover that a form or questions for the next administration have been leaked, we will work to determine how the materials were stolen and how widely accessible they may be. If we discover the leak early enough, we replace the form in the affected areas. Closer to test day, and if the stolen materials are tightly contained, we may continue with the administration as planned and perform highly reliable post-administration statistical analyses on the results to identify cheating students. If the leak is more widespread, we cancel the administration and allow students to test on a different date. And if we find out about stolen materials *after* test day, we take the appropriate actions, ranging from post-test analytics to more widespread score cancellation.

### **Specific actions on behalf of test security**

You asked about the decisions for specific administrations. Here’s how we handled them:

- May and June 2013, South Korea:
  - *Substantiate claims:* In May and June of 2013 (before lock boxes were put in place), ETS and the College Board knew that our test material had been stolen. Specific information shared with ETS by South Korean law enforcement officials was instrumental in that understanding.
  - *Determine actions:* Because there wasn’t enough time to deliver a different test form, and because the information we had had indicated wide access to the stolen materials, we decided that the best course of action was to cancel the South Korea administration.
- October 2015, China:
  - *Substantiate claims:* In October 2015 we had no evidence that any form had been stolen or that anyone knew which test form was going to be used. We received a tip from a source prior to the administration, but the information lacked the specific facts to deem it credible. Given that lock boxes were being used in October 2015, and that there was no evidence that anyone was in possession of the test, ETS did not believe the test form was highly exposed. ETS believed the source was using this outreach to gain knowledge for his own benefit because this particular source had previously stolen test material. As we monitored the chatter in advance of the October administration, the level of chatter online



- was not much more than prior administrations and was lacking in evidence.
- *Determine actions:* Based on the analysis of the information we had, we determined with ETS that there was no need to cancel the administration.
- January 2016, China and Macau:
  - *Substantiate claims:* Before the January 2016 administration, we received evidence that the test form being used in some test centers near China was for sale. ETS was able to validate that the test was available for sale.
  - *Determine actions:* Because we didn't have time to get a different test form to these centers, we canceled the administration in China and Macau. We did not need to cancel the Hong Kong administration because Hong Kong was using a different test form, and there was no evidence that students had gained access to that form.

### **College Board enhanced security measures**

As we confront those attempting to steal and share test materials, we use a range of procedures to prevent security violations. We constantly enhance our security efforts. For instance, upon closing registration for the first administration of the redesigned SAT, our analysis of registrants showed an unusually high number of individuals meeting criteria associated with a higher security risk. As a result, we have instituted a new security measure, effective immediately, which aims to ensure that anyone taking the test is doing so for its intended purpose: to apply to and attend a college or university undergraduate program, or to apply for scholarship, financial aid, or other programs that require a college admissions test.

Test takers identified as likely to be taking the test for other purposes, and who were registered for the March 5, 2016, exam, have been transferred to the May 7, 2016, exam, which will be an administration after which the test form is disclosed. We have informed those test takers affected and will work to accommodate the needs of those who have an application deadline that requires them to sit for the March administration.

With the new SAT, we will continue to take bold actions to stop cheating and theft, which present critical challenges to all who are working to expand educational opportunities to international students. We stand by the actions we took to protect the integrity of the exam. Students and our members who rely on valid SAT scores will continue to drive all of our decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Caldwell".

Stacy Caldwell  
Vice President, College Readiness Assessments  
The College Board

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia B. Schmeiser".

Cynthia B. Schmeiser, PhD  
Chief, Assessments  
The College Board