Consequences of the Addition of the SAT Writing Section

A Survey of Writing Changes in the Nation’s K-12 Educational System

Richard J. Noeth, Consultant
Jennifer L. Kobrin, The College Board
Diminishing Writing Skills

- Writing is a core skill needed for success in both education and the workplace.

- Only 2% of 8th graders and 1% of 12th graders scored at the “Advanced” level, and 33% and 24%, respectively scored at the “Proficient” level in the latest NAEP Writing Assessment (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2007).

- 14% of entering college freshmen enroll in remedial writing courses (NCES, 2003).
The SAT Writing Section Introduced to:

- Strengthen writing in our nation’s schools and colleges
- Reinforce the importance of writing skills throughout a student’s education
- Enhance all students’ chances of academic success
- Help administrators to determine students’ readiness to successfully meet postsecondary writing demands.
Purpose of the Study

- To learn about changes in writing instruction across the nation’s K-12 education system in the 3 years after the announcement of the SAT writing section.
- To describe the near-term impact of the SAT writing section on K-12 education.
Consequential Validity

Pertains to the social consequences of using a particular test for a particular purpose.

It is important to gather evidence of positive consequences of using a test as well as evidence that any adverse consequences are minimal (Messick, 1989; Brualdi, 1999).
The Target Sample

- Two populations of K-12 educators – English Language Arts teachers and District Administrators
- Represents all 6 College Board regions and includes all 50 states plus District of Columbia.
- Stratified on school/district metropolitan area and size.
- Over-sampling in states with high SAT volumes.
- 56,384 teachers and 10,918 administrators were surveyed.
Survey Components

Four Sections, Focusing on Changes in:

1. Priorities, attitudes, expectations, and awareness related to writing
2. How writing is taught, (e.g., number of writing courses, frequency of essay tests and assignments; teaching methods and rigor)
3. Learning related to writing (e.g., student performance, writing programs, standards).
4. Resources (e.g., professional development, time to grade writing assignments, and other resources).

“SAT writing section impact” question at end of each section
Response Rates

- **Teachers** – 9% \( (N=4,922) \) completed survey and 10% \( (N=5,716) \) answered at least one question.

- **Administrators** – 8% \( (N=826) \) completed survey and 9% \( (N=949) \) answered at least one question.

- The schools/districts represented in the sample were similar to the nation in terms of metropolitan area, diversity, and size.
Survey Results – Attitudes/Priorities
“Has writing become more of a priority in your school/district?”

SAT Impact: Two-thirds of the teachers and 58% of administrators: SAT Writing was a major or minor factor in this change.
Survey Results – Teaching of Writing

Has more class time been spent on writing projects, writing assignments, writing analysis, and/or related writing activities in English/Language Arts courses?

- Yes, more than 10%: 36.5% for Teachers, 34.1% for Administrators
- Yes, up to 10%: 43.5% for Teachers, 47.0% for Administrators
- No: 16.3% for Teachers, 11.9% for Administrators
- I don’t know: 7.0% for Teachers, 3.7% for Administrators

Has there been an increase in writing courses throughout your school/district?

- Yes, more than 10%: 36.5% for Teachers, 34.1% for Administrators
- Yes, up to 10%: 43.5% for Teachers, 47.0% for Administrators
- No: 16.3% for Teachers, 11.9% for Administrators
- I don’t know: 7.0% for Teachers, 3.7% for Administrators

- Yes, 3 or more: 2.5% for Teachers, 3.3% for Administrators
- Yes, 1 or 2 more: 24.8% for Teachers, 26.4% for Administrators
- No: 71.3% for Teachers, 65.6% for Administrators
- I don’t know: 4.7% for Teachers, 1.4% for Administrators

Has there been an increase in writing courses throughout your school/district?
Has overall curriculum rigor (e.g., in-depth focus within or across certain course topics, a greater emphasis on critical thinking) been increased by greater attention to writing?"

- Yes, significantly, 19.3%
- Yes, significantly, 22.5%
- Yes, slightly, 54.8%
- Yes, slightly, 57.0%
- No, 16.3%
- No, 12.5%
- No greater attention to writing, 3.7%
- No greater attention to writing, 1.9%
- I don't know, 5.9%
- I don't know, 6.1%
SAT Writing Impact on the Teaching of Writing

Roughly 3/5 of both groups reported that the SAT Writing section had been either a major or a minor factor in changing the teaching of writing.
Survey Results – Learning Related to Writing

59% of Administrators reported that there had been expanded and/or new writing proficiency requirements. These administrators were then asked to specify these requirements (check all that apply).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage of Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part of graduation requirements</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of end-of-year middle school and/or high school performance requirements</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated into expectations for college readiness</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater focus on assessment and analysis of writing proficiency</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Special or remedial programs for ESL students or those not writing at expected levels have been expanded and/or implemented (39% teachers, 44% administrators).

• Slightly more than half of both groups (53%) indicated that the SAT Writing section had been a major or minor factor in changes in learning related to writing.
33% of teachers and 55% of administrators reported that more resources had been allocated to writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Percentage of Teachers</th>
<th>Percentage of Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional staff members</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical resources</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial programs, materials, assessments</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• 81% of administrators, but only 64% of teachers reported much more or slightly more professional development of teachers with regard to writing.

• Only 13% of administrators and 7% of teachers indicated that more time had been set aside to evaluate students’ writing.

• A somewhat larger proportion of administrators (40%) than teachers (one-third) reported that the SAT writing section was a factor in increasing writing resources.
# The Importance Placed on Writing Three Years Ago and Today*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Writing</th>
<th>Percentage of Teachers</th>
<th>Percentage of Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 years ago</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No importance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little importance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither stressed nor ignored</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly important</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of most prominent parts of curriculum</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The survey was administered in fall 2006, therefore the responses for “3 years ago” refer to the year 2003, and the responses for “today” refer to fall 2006.
Overall SAT Impact - “Has the SAT writing section been a factor in the increased importance that your school/district has placed on writing?”

- Teachers: 61%
  - Major Factor: 11.6%
  - Minor Factor: 49.2%
  - No Factor: 28.5%
  - I don't know: 10.7%

- Administrators: 55%
  - Major Factor: 5.8%
  - Minor Factor: 48.8%
  - No Factor: 36.7%
  - I don't know: 8.7%
Conclusions

• In the 3 years after the first announcement of the SAT writing section, the teachers and district administrators surveyed reported major changes with regard to writing.

• The SAT writing section had a role in supporting these changes.

• There was general consistency between teachers and administrators in their responses, and there were very few notable differences between high-minority and low-minority schools and districts.
Limitations

- Teacher sample did not include those without email addresses.
- In some cases, more than one teacher from the same high school responded to the survey and did not give the same answers.
- Retrospective approach (respondents were asked to recall changes from 3 years ago).
Thank You!

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  Jennifer Kobrin at: jkobrin@collegeboard.org
Coding of Open-Ended Comments

- Focus is on the state writing test (35% administrators, 19% teachers).
- Emphasis is on SAT (and/or ACT) preparation (26% teachers, 25% administrators).
- The emphasis on writing is not new; current initiatives only emphasize what our importance for student writing has been for years (21% teachers, 23% administrators).
- The district supports writing initiatives (21% administrators, only 4% teachers).
- Emphasis is on cross-curricular approaches to writing (17% administrators, 14% teachers).
- The school or district has an intensive writing focus (16% teachers, 14% administrators).
- Teachers need more time to do their job effectively, to assign and grade writing assignments (15% teachers, only 5% administrators).
- Staff attends workshops and/or conferences to continue professional development (13% administrators, only 6% teachers).