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An 'Easy' SAT and Terrible Scores

> Math scores for June's examination leave many students in disbelief and frustration, blasting the power of curves.

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When students took the SAT in June, many of them reported that the mathematics portion seemed unusually easy. They were correct.
But on Wednesday, many discovered that an SAT that is easier than expected can turn an expected 760 score into a 610 or worse. For rising high school seniors hoping for just another 40 points or so to impress colleges (beyond the score they likely earned a few months ago), this was not what they were expecting.

Word spread on various social media outlets, including the new @rescoreJuneSAT Twitter feed and another one, @rescoresat (featuring the emoji at right). Angry test takers appealed to the College Board for a do-over of some type and asked for intervention from President Trump and Ellen DeGeneres, among others.

Many students (and plenty of parents) posted comparisons of scores based on how many questions were incorrect on different tests.
"College Board! One daughter got 760 getting only 5 wrong in math in March. Her twin missed 6 in math on June 2 test and got 670? 90 point difference in overall SAT scores for just ONE math question? How is that fair or standardized? So many kids hurt," wrote one parent.

"My first SAT I miss 26 questions and score a 1400. My second SAT I miss 16 questions and score a 1350?!?!" wrote one student. (Many other comments on social media use harsh language, but the themes are the same.)

Several complained about having used tutoring services or coaches (frequently at considerable expense) in the months before the June SAT to improve their mathematics proficiency -- only to find their scores fall.

The problem, in short, is that the SAT is scored on a curve. If the mathematics exam is unusually easy, students will on average get more questions correct than in a typical SAT administration. But the College Board then compensates with a curve, and missing a relatively small number of questions can result in a much lower score than would typically be the case.

The College Board released the email message it has been sending to those students who have been complaining.

"We understand your questions about your June SAT scores," the message says. "We want to assure you that your scores are accurate. While we plan for consistency across administrations, on occasion there are some tests that can be easier or more difficult than usual. That is why we use a statistical process called 'equating.' Equating makes sure that a score for a test taken on one date is equivalent to a score from another date. So, for example, a single incorrect answer on one administration could equal two or three incorrect answers on a more difficult version. The equating process ensures fairness for all students."
The Princeton Review, which runs a variety of test-prep services, published a lengthy analysis of the situation Wednesday night called "Why You Don't Want an Easy SAT."

The analysis was generally sympathetic to the idea of equating, as done by the College Board, and said that the process typically assures fairness. But the analysis also said that while this may work well for modest variations in the

difficulty of two SAT administrations, it may be problematic for a test like the June SAT.

"The equating applied to the June 2018 SAT suggests that the College Board made the test far too easy to distinguish among high scorers who received a score of 650 (86th percentile) or higher. That is a problem for those colleges who treat a 650, a 700, a 750, and an 800 as accurate indicators of real differences in Math ability," the Princeton Review said. "It is a problem, too, for high-scoring students who make the occasional careless error or who misbubble on questions that they are quite capable of answering. With a typical curve, there's some cushion to mitigate the impact of such errors. There was no cushion on the June 2018 SAT."

As for why this matters, the analysis said, "It might be fair to say that the most accomplished students shouldn't make those kinds of errors, but is that true? Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the most accomplished test takers don't make those kinds of errors. Small mistakes under time pressure can make a big difference in life, no doubt, but doing well in college tends to be about doing well over time with the possibility to revise, rethink, and do better."

https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/07/12/surprisingly-low-scores-mathematics-sat-stun-and-anger-students?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=060c11dfb1-DNU_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-060c11dfb1-198467257&mc_cid=060c11dfb1&mc_eid=0c2028f1a2