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For Better or For Worse - the New SAT  
by Kim Overholt

Over the last year, I've made it a point to discover all that I could about the New SAT test so that I can confidently disseminate the information to my mid-level junior English students attending a parochial school whose calling is to "prepare its students for a lifetime of learning, growth, service, integrity, responsibility, accountability and justice" (Doers of the Word 2005). So of course, I began skeptically though I was hopeful the change would benefit my students without lowering the standards that they should maintain.

My first impression during a College Board presentation was that the changes to the New SAT seemed overwhelming. Now that I've become more acclimated to its amalgamated phraseologies and justified restructuring, I've made some new discoveries. To begin with, I was able to readily procure a very valuable education tool, in particular a compact disc with numerous Powerpoint presentations for guidance counselors, math and English teachers in addition to the general populace. [Note: Check with your school's guidance department, for The College Board said that they've sent "Score Write" folders to all high schools.] After spending some time with my students reviewing "The New SAT for High School English Teachers," I realized that the test is much clearer in its amplification of students' thinking abilities. This new insight surprised me for I was greatly concerned to learn that they had removed verbal analogies and math quantities. Though I cannot speak for the math department, I've always felt that analogies innately required students to access their higher level thinking skills, so to remove them was another negative effect on educational standards. The College Board's justification in making these changes, as I came to learn, is authenticity - making the test more like the secondary and collegiate classrooms. Likewise, the new writing section has re-structured its multiple choice questions on the same premise, asking students to identify what good writing is versus what grammatical rules are being used - another imitation of English classes that ride the cusp between whole language and traditional pedagogies. As for the actual essay writing, well what can I say? That's the only part that got my vote from the get-go!

What do my students think? When I first began our college unit starting with the New SAT, I thought that their anxieties were based on all the changes. Yet after polling 89 students, I was reminded that once again their nature makes them more receptive to these changes, so their fears really lay in the ramifications of the scores in context of their future. Furthermore, after reviewing the test, I had expected them to flinch under the weight of cognitive breadth expected by the test; but of course, they proved me wrong again. (Sometimes I wonder who the student is and who's the teacher.) 97% of them are planning on taking the new SAT; 66% of those are concerned about taking it while 34% aren't. Not concerned? Didn't they grasp what I showed them?

Don't they complain in class when I ask them to think that hard? Lastly, when I asked them to finish the phrase, "I will do well on..." 44% of them said that they were confident about the writing section. Are they nuts? Don't they read my repetitious comments on their essays condemning them for making me suffer slovenly proofread articulations?

So, once again what I first perceived to be an error, the New SAT, I quickly learned, has its merits, for I believe improvements have definitely been made. Scores are more accessible online within approximately three weeks providing proximal feedback. The new reports are filled with a plethora of information ranging from familiar 200-800 scores and medians to “College Success Skills” scores that help students “focus further academic attention in those areas that will help prepare them for college-level work.” And after comparing their mean subject test scores, students can click on the “College Quickfinder” link to find which of the 3,600 colleges listed accepts their SAT scores. The test is definitely not for the faint of heart, no doubt; but for better or for worse, it’s definitely here to stay. (For more information, log onto [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).)