

A Pressure-Free SAT?

Those standardized tests that many colleges require, such as the SAT and ACT, can be real pressure cookers for young students. But they don't have to be.

It certainly seems like an unenjoyable way to spend a Saturday morning, but nearly every college requires some form of standardized test. It all boils down to a single number: your child's SAT or ACT score.

A pressure cooker that causes untold worry among our nation's high school students, the SAT Reasoning Test (its official name) and its rival standardized exam, the ACT, are important measures of a student's ability to do college-level school work under pressure. In a culture obsessed with measurable performance, as ours surely is, they can be overemphasized, however. In their book, *Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College Admissions and Beyond*, Marilee Jones, dean of admissions

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP, argue that it is overemphasized.

"Although they are very helpful to admissions officers as indicators of a student's ability to perform well under stress and to code and decode, SAT scores do not define your intelligence, your talent, or your worth as a person," Jones and Ginsburg write. In fact, while admissions officers consider the tests useful, these standardized scores are not the only factor considered in accepting students for enrollment. "This culture is obsessed with numbers and quantifying performance and, as a result, many people believe that SAT scores actually mean much more than they really do."

Jones and Ginsburg point out that while SAT scores tend to correlate with college success, they don't predict it. "Lower scores can correlate with good performance, too," they write. "So if you're one of those students who feels ashamed by your SAT or ACT results, you must not let them define your self-worth." One key to remember, according to the authors, is that many successful people fared poorly on the standardized tests. "I know that some MIT faculty members had SAT scores in their youth that are considered low by today's standards," Jones and Ginsburg write. "Yet they are among the most brilliant and successful humans on the planet."

Why is that so? "When the topic of 'success in life' is studied, it turns out that standardized test scores do not correlate with anything once the student graduates from college. Character traits such as resilience, optimism, and enthusiasm seem to guarantee success no matter what the person's SAT scores were."

No question, it's worth the prospective college student's time to prepare for the standardized test he or she will be taking. But the results should be kept in perspective, write Jones and Ginsburg. "Remember, there are many colleges that will accept you exactly as you are, no matter what scores you have." ●

