

# NACAC

## National Association for College Admission Counseling

*...guiding the way to higher education*

January 22, 2009

Gaston Caperton, President  
The College Board  
45 Columbus Avenue  
New York, NY 10023-6917

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Dear Governor Caperton:

On behalf of the 11,000 members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, we are pleased to share the Report of the NACAC Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission. The Commission issued its report in September, and the NACAC Board of Directors approved the recommendations contained therein at its subsequent meeting in November, 2008.

The report contains numerous recommendations, several of which pertain directly to the College Board, intended to promote best practice with respect to the use of standardized tests in undergraduate admission. While Joyce Smith and David Hawkins of NACAC conducted a conference call with Jim Montoya in December, this letter initiates our formal follow-up with the College Board.

The Commission identified several areas in which it believed the College Board could play a role in the improvement of admission practice. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the members of NACAC, we officially convey these recommendations and comments to you.

The Commission identified the following areas of concern regarding the misuse of college admission tests:

**1. Cease Using Cutscores as Initial Scholarship Eligibility Screen.** The Commission called upon the National Merit Scholarship Corporation to cease using non-contextualized PSAT scores as the "initial screen" for eligibility for the National Merit scholar recognition or scholarships. As part of this recommendation, the Commission also called on the College Board to explain why it allows the use of its PSAT as a cutscore, a practice that is at odds with best practices in the use of admission test scores.

The Commission considered the College Board's research on the relationship of the PSAT/NMSQT to academic achievement in high school during its deliberations. While the Commission agreed that the PSAT represents one valid tool to assess academic achievement, it did not believe that the primary findings of the research sufficiently addressed the propriety of the use of the PSAT as the only factor to determine initial eligibility for National Merit Scholarships.

NACAC would like to work with the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation in their roles as the cosponsors of the PSAT/NMSQT to develop a process that the National Merit Scholarship Corporation could use to mitigate the effects of using a single PSAT score as the first consideration for National Merit Scholarship recognition.

**2. Institute Admission Test Usage Audit.** The Commission recommended that an audit of admission test usage by the College Board and ACT, similar to the auditing system currently in place for the College Board's Advanced Placement curriculum, may help limit the misuse of tests by bringing the organizations' combined weight to bear on those institutions and organizations that misuse admission test scores. We would like your opinion about how a procedure such as this could be formalized.

1050 N. Highland Street  
Suite 400  
Arlington, VA 22201  
Phone: 703/836-2222  
800/822-6285  
Fax: 703/243-9375  
Web: [www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org)

**3. State Use of Admission Tests for K-12 Accountability.** The Commission expressed concern over the use of admission tests, without modification, as accountability measures for secondary schools—a purpose for which admission exams were not designed. The Commission believed that states should be careful not to assume that admission tests are aligned with high school standards, and that the process of aligning curricular standards with concepts measured in tests is a necessary first step toward considering their use as high school assessments. Several states that use admission tests in this manner have found it necessary to modify the exams to properly align with state standards. We would like to initiate a formal conversation among testing agencies and policymakers to determine how future admission policy can be better aligned with college preparatory coursework in secondary schools without stretching either beyond their practical limits, and would ask for your support in helping to raise awareness among policymakers and the public about the purposes of admission tests.

The Commission also identified opportunities to conduct further research in the following areas:

**1. Test Preparation.** NACAC will seek external support from foundations to conduct an independent evaluation of test preparation to ensure that admission practitioners, students and families have access to proper consumer information about the effects of test preparation programs. As we begin the process of outlining our research process, we would like to ask for the College Board's assistance in assembling research and designing research to more fully explore this issue.

**2. Independent Training for College Admission Counseling Professionals.** College Board and ACT provide excellent training for college admission counseling professionals. However, the Commission recommended that NACAC develop training on the fundamentals of admission testing that is independent of either test agency. Work is already underway on this project, and College Board staff has been assisting NACAC staff in the completion of this project.

**3. Predictive Validity.** The Commission recommended that NACAC develop a body of knowledge related to predictive validity research on testing in admission. We have begun the process of reaching out to our members, and will reach out to the College Board for research it may want to contribute.

The Commission's work has generated considerable interest among our membership, the media, and the public concerned with admission practice in the United States. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the College Board to ensure that the recommendations provided by the Commission come to fruition.

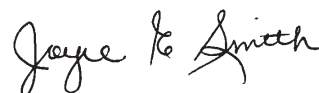
We have made this letter and other communications related to the NACAC Testing Commission public via the NACAC web site ([www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org)). With your permission, we would like to make as much of the communications surrounding this report available to the public as possible to ensure an inclusive and transparent process of following up on the Commission's recommendations.

A reply to this communication by March 15, 2009 will ensure that the NACAC Board of Directors can follow up on the Commission's recommendations in a timely fashion. We appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to working with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,



William McClintick  
President



Joyce E. Smith  
CEO

cc: NACAC Board of Directors  
NACAC Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission  
Lester P. Monts, Chair, Board of Trustees, College Board  
Youlanda Copeland-Morgan, Vice-Chair, Board of Trustees, College Board  
Jim Montoya, Vice-President for Higher Education Relationship Development, College Board