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## Score Choice and What You Should Know About It

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Since everyone is enjoying a break from homework, car pools, and after school activities, now is the perfect time to learn more about college admissions in a less hectic environment. One of the more difficult choices students have to face when they apply to college is whether to use the CollegeBoard's new Score Choice option. Score Choice offers students the opportunity to decide what test scores to send to schools. Score choice is a much debated subject as well as an issue of some complexity; my goal in this article is to try to put things in perspective for students and their families.

In June 2008 CollegeBoard introduced Score Choice. Prior to this announcement, when a student took any SAT exam, the results became part of the student's official testing record. When a student requested test scores be sent to colleges, CollegeBoard complied by sending all scores from each test date. Since the advent of Score Choice, the college admissions world has debated the policy from every imaginable angle. Critics of the policy maintain that it favors wealthier students who can afford costly test preparation and multiple testing sessions to try and boost their scores. They argue that affluent students have an unfair advantage over students who are unable to afford coaching and repeated test administration fees. On the other side supporters insist that Score Choice was designed to reduce student stress by giving the option to choose what SAT scores to send to colleges. They point to free or low cost test prep options that would serve to level the playing field for all students regardless of family income. Still other commentators wonder what all the fuss is. After all, CollegeBoard gives students the option of what SAT scores to send to colleges, and colleges set their own admissions criteria as they always have done. So what's the problem?

Here's the problem. It is true that colleges determine their own admissions requirements. And that fact has not changed because CollegeBoard introduced Score Choice. However, since Score Choice was implemented, institutions across the nation have been driven to clarify their policies with respect to it. For example, Yale, Stanford, Cornell, Pomona, University of Southern California and University of Pennsylvania have stated that they will continue to require applicants to send all scores from each testing date. Harvard and University of Chicago say students can decide to send their highest scores from any single sitting. Meanwhile, Colby College and Williams say Score Choice is irrelevant because they already cherry-pick the highest individual math, critical reading and writing scores from each student's test sessions-this being the most lenient policy of all. These colleges express the legitimate concern that students may inadvertently suppress scores that could be beneficial to their application; Score Choice does not permit students to select individual section scores.

Is this all confusing? Indeed it is, and unnecessarily so. The already complex admissions process is certain to become more stressful than ever if students get caught up in this latest admissions frenzy. What students need to understand is fairly simple. Students typically finalize the list of schools they plan to apply to in the fall of their senior year. By then most students have taken the SAT and/or the ACT at least once. As students check the application requirements of the colleges they plan to apply to, they learn what these schools want to see in terms of scores. Since you are ethically bound to comply with all of a school's admissions requirements, the illusion of score choice fades, as colleges assert their rights to see whatever scores they wish to use to evaluate applicants. If you use Score Choice, it will be your responsibility to pay strict attention to each college's policy in order to know what to send and when. Problems could result due to misinterpretation of policy, gaps in applications and even missed deadlines as you wait for the latest round of test score results.

My advice to students is to steer clear of Score Choice and send your schools all your scores. Prepare well for standardized testing by using practice tests to gain confidence and improve your scores. There are many books available with practice tests (Check out CollegeBoard's The Official Guide to the SAT). Take advantage of free on-line programs (visit [www.number2.com](http://www.number2.com)). As soon as you have acceptable results, put standardized testing behind you, relax, and move on to the next step in the college admissions process. Remember, the majority of the nation's schools accept the majority of applicants. Colleges and universities want to accept you, so prepare as best you can and don't lose sleep over standardized testing.

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options, create a college list and prepare a strong, organized and cohesive application. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC, and HECA and earned a certification in College Admissions and Career Planning from University of California at Berkeley.

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