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THE TREND TOWARDS ERADICATING STANDARDIZED TESTS FOR COLLEGE ADMISSIONS WILL INCREASE SOCIOECONOMIC BARRIERS FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED STUDENTS

Shelby Batson

I. INTRODUCTION

For undergraduate college admissions for the fall of 2023, nearly eighty percent of public and private universities did not require ACT or SAT scores in their applications.¹ These schools either did not accept standardized test scores or instead made them optional to include.² The push towards eradicating standardized testing has been years in the making.³ This is largely due to the recognized race gaps in both ACT and SAT test scores.⁴ For instance, in 2021, the mean total SAT score for white students was 1,112, compared to 934 for Black students.⁵ With these disparities in mind, it is no surprise that there has been support for universities to no longer require standardized tests for admission.⁶ However, it was the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and subsequent educational disruptions that caused many universities to finally do away with the exams.⁷

By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic.⁸ Shortly after, both schools and universities shut down to stop the spread of the virus.⁹ Consequently, students were also unable to access

¹ Patty Collier, *Nearly 80% of Colleges Moving Away from ACT, SAT Testing for Admission*, WKBN (Feb. 23, 2022, 12:10 PM), <https://www.wkbn.com/news/local-news/nearly-80-of-colleges-moving-away-from-act-sat-testing-for-admission/>.

² *Id.*

³ Janet Lorin, *Why U.S. Colleges Are Rethinking Standardized Tests*, WASH. POST (Mar. 15, 2022, 8:04 AM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-us-colleges-are-rethinking-standardized-tests/2022/03/14/81c7fd9a-a3a0-11ec-8628-3da4fa8f8714_story.html.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Joseph Soares, *Dismantling White Supremacy Includes Ending Racist Tests like the SAT and ACT*, TCHR. COLL. PRESS: BLOG (June 22, 2020), <https://www.tpress.com/blog/dismantling-white-supremacy-includes-racist-tests-sat-act/>.

⁷ Shawn Hubler, *University of California Will End Use of SAT and ACT in Admissions*, N.Y. TIMES (May 21, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/us/university-california-sat-act.html>.

⁸ Laura Baker & Education Week Staff, *Forever Changed: A Timeline of How COVID Upended Schools*, EDUC. WEEK (Apr. 5, 2022), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/forever-changed-a-timeline-of-how-covid-upended-schools/2022/04#:~:text=March%2011%2C%202020%3A%20The%20World,close%20schools%20across%20the%20nation%20>.

⁹ *Id.*

testing centers to take the ACT or SAT.¹⁰ As COVID-19 restrictions and mandates lifted, many universities chose not to start requiring test scores again.¹¹ Instead, they are relying on the other components of students' applications for admission decisions.¹² But while some may see this as a triumph for diversity and inclusion, eradicating the requirement for standardized tests may lead to increased inequity in the college admissions process.

II. THE HISTORY OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Standardized tests have been used over several centuries to assess an individual's knowledge and skills in specific subjects.¹³ The goal of the standardized test is to provide the examiner with objective results that can be easily compared.¹⁴ The first known standardized test was administered in imperial China in the third century B.C.E.¹⁵ The exam was designed to determine qualified candidates to serve the emperor and his family.¹⁶ It covered several subjects, including horsemanship, music, calligraphy, arithmetic, and ceremonial knowledge.¹⁷ As time passed, more subjects were added to the test, including civil law, agriculture, poetry, and geography.¹⁸ In fact, the emperor often chose the material for the exams and would examine the final remaining candidates himself.¹⁹

Many centuries later, the United States experienced newfound industrial and economic growth during the Industrial Revolution.²⁰ Expanded railroads made for easier travel and transportation of goods, while technological advancements allowed for more efficient production.²¹ There also was a substantial increase in

¹⁰ Scott Jaschik, *More Bad News for the SAT*, INSIDE HIGHER ED (Sept. 27, 2020), <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/09/28/hundreds-thousands-who-registered-sat-unable-take-it>.

¹¹ Hubler, *supra* note 7.

¹² Lorin, *supra* note 3.

¹³ Igor Himelfarb, *A Primer on Standardized Testing: History, Measurement, Classical Test Theory, Item Response Theory, and Equating*, 33 J. CHIROPRACTIC EDUC. 151 (2019).

¹⁴ Lisa Tunnell, *Standardized Tests: The Benefits and Impacts of Implementing Standardized Tests*, EDUC. ADVANCED: BLOG (Feb. 24, 2022), <https://educationadvanced.com/resources/blog/standardized-tests-the-benefits-and-impacts-of-implementing-standardized/>.

¹⁵ Himelfarb, *supra* note 13.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Dan Fletcher, *Standardized Testing*, TIME MAG. (Dec. 11, 2009), <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1947019,00.html>.

²¹ Richard Hornbeck, *Railroads, Reallocation, and the Rise of American Manufacturing*, BECKER FRIEDMAN INST. (Mar. 2, 2020), <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/insight/research-summary/railroads-reallocation-and-the-rise-of-american-manufacturing/>.

population, largely due to improved sanitation practices and medical advancements.²² This increase in population, as well as a decreased need for child labor, afforded greater opportunity for more children to attend school.²³ Consequently, the education system turned to standardized tests for an easy and efficient way to assess students.²⁴

Following the Industrial Revolution, the presidents of twelve leading universities at the time decided to form the College Entrance Examination Board in 1900.²⁵ The goal of the Board was to standardize admissions and create a basic curriculum.²⁶ One year later, the Board administered the first College Board exam.²⁷ The exam tested specific subjects and was presented in essay format rather than multiple choice.²⁸ Shortly after, in 1905, the first IQ test was created by psychologist Alfred Binet.²⁹ Binet was tasked with creating a test for students who were falling behind in school.³⁰ The test needed to determine whether remaining in the classroom would be beneficial for those students or if they needed special education.³¹ The final product was a thirty-question exam designed to measure each student's mental age.³²

Standardized testing gained traction during its implementation to the military.³³ During World War I, Robert Yerkes, a Harvard professor, was the first to suggest administering an IQ test to military recruits.³⁴ Along with other prominent psychologists of the time, Yerkes developed the Army Alpha Examination.³⁵ The goal of the exam was to highlight potential officers among the recruits, as well as those who could be useful in other military operations.³⁶ This was the first time an IQ test had been administered on such a large scale.³⁷

²² *What is Modern Medicine?*, MED. NEWS TODAY, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323538> (July 26, 2023).

²³ Fletcher, *supra* note 20.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *History of the SAT: A Timeline*, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/sats/where/timeline.html> (last visited Nov. 20, 2022).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Himelfarb, *supra* note 13, at 152.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ PBS, *supra* note 25.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

One of the fundamental psychologists who worked alongside Yerkes in creating the Army Alpha Examination was Carl Brigham.³⁸ After assisting with the military IQ test, Brigham published a book analyzing the results titled *A Study of American Intelligence*.³⁹ In his book, Brigham discussed the military recruits' performances and categorized them based on race.⁴⁰ He concluded that the American education system is in decline "and will proceed with an accelerating rate as the racial mixture becomes more and more extensive."⁴¹ After his book was published, Brigham decided to give students at Princeton University a version of the Army Alpha Examination.⁴² Consequently, the College Board placed Brigham in charge of developing a test that colleges could use uniformly for all admission decisions.⁴³ Along with a committee of other Board members, Brigham created what is now referred to as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).⁴⁴ The test was first administered to students in 1926, but it has been redesigned many times since its creation.⁴⁵ Today, the SAT consists of three sections—reading, writing, and math—and students are given a total score ranging from 400 to 1600.⁴⁶

More than thirty years after the creation of the SAT, one professor decided to create a new college admissions exam.⁴⁷ Everett Lindquist was an education professor at the University of Iowa.⁴⁸ Lindquist had been an active participant in the development of standardized tests since the creation of the SAT.⁴⁹ But he felt that the SAT was designed to evaluate a student's theoretical reasoning skills rather than their actual knowledge.⁵⁰ Lindquist also felt that testing the practical knowledge of students was a better representation of how they would perform at the collegiate level.⁵¹ Lindquist created the ACT along with Ted McCarrel, who was the University of Iowa's registrar.⁵² The ACT today consists of math, science,

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Americans Instrumental in Establishing Standardized Tests*, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/sats/where/three> (last visited Oct. 18, 2023).

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *How Scores Are Calculated*, COLL. BD., <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/scores/understanding-scores/how-scores-are-calculated> (last visited Oct. 12, 2023).

⁴⁷ *The History of the ACT*, MANHATTAN REV., <https://www.manhattanreview.com/act-history/> (last visited Nov. 20, 2022).

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

reading, and English sections.⁵³ The first ACT was administered in 1959, and the test has continued to be a staple of the college admissions process since.⁵⁴

III. RACIAL DISPARITIES IN STANDARDIZED TESTS

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most undergraduate universities required a student's scores for either the ACT or SAT to be considered for admission.⁵⁵ As previously stated, most universities stopped requiring standardized test scores during the pandemic as a safety precaution.⁵⁶ However, despite mandates being lifted and testing centers being reopened, around eighty percent of public and private universities did not require ACT or SAT scores for undergraduate admission for the fall of 2023.⁵⁷ This decision seems to be largely motivated by the racial disparities found within both the SAT and ACT.⁵⁸

Statistically, Black students score lower than their white peers on tests designed to measure aptitude and intelligence.⁵⁹ This is also true for standardized math, vocabulary, and reading tests.⁶⁰ Studies show that this gap is first apparent when students are in kindergarten and worsens over time.⁶¹ While there have been extensive efforts from standardized test makers to close this gap, Black students still score below seventy-five percent of white students on all standardized tests.⁶² These numbers are certainly not the case for all students, but this is a large enough gap to warrant serious concern. Focusing on the SAT, the average score in 2020 for

⁵³ *ACT Sections: What's on the ACT?*, PRINCETON REV., <https://www.princetonreview.com/college/act-sections#:~:text=The%20ACT%20includes%20the%20following,questions%20on%20the%20ACT%20test>. (last visited Oct. 18, 2023).

⁵⁴ MANHATTAN REV., *supra* note 47.

⁵⁵ Mary Churchill, *The SAT and ACT Are Less Important Than You Might Think*, INSIDE HIGHER ED: BLOG (Jan. 29, 2023), <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-policy/sat-and-act-are-less-important-you-might-think>.

⁵⁶ Jaschik, *supra* note 10.

⁵⁷ Coller, *supra* note 1.

⁵⁸ Shriya Bhattacharya, *Education Advocates Say the Best Way to Address Racial Bias in Standardized Testing is to Eliminate the Tests Completely*, PRISM (Jan. 31, 2022), <https://prismreports.org/2022/01/31/education-advocates-say-the-best-way-to-address-racial-bias-in-standardized-testing-is-to-eliminate-the-tests-completely/>.

⁵⁹ Christopher Jencks & Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap: Why It Persists and What Can Be Done*, BROOKINGS (Mar. 1, 1998), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-black-white-test-score-gap-why-it-persists-and-what-can-be-done/>.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

Black students was a 454 and a 478 for Latino students.⁶³ Meanwhile, the average score for white students was a 547 and for Asian students a 632.⁶⁴ Once again, there appears to be a race-related gap between students' performances on standardized tests.⁶⁵ Consequently, these troubling statistics raise the ever-important question of what is causing these racial disparities.

For many, the answer to this question is that the standardized tests are biased against Black and Latino students.⁶⁶ Professor and author Young Whan Choi notes two ways that racial bias has an impact on standardized tests.⁶⁷ First, he discusses what is known as the stereotype threat.⁶⁸ This threat is caused by the negative stereotypes that exist regarding students of color.⁶⁹ For example, there is the stereotype that Black students are superior to their white peers in athletics but inferior in academic settings.⁷⁰ It is easy to see how this and other harmful stereotypes about Black students could manifest poor test performance.⁷¹ These students begin a test with the belief they will do poorly.⁷² The fear of conforming to these stereotypes can cause increased anxiety and stress that their white peers do not have to endure.⁷³

Moreover, Choi notes that another way racial bias has an impact on standardized tests is in the way the test is written.⁷⁴ Many standardized tests have assumptions about students built in that can result in racial and socioeconomic bias.⁷⁵ For instance, Choi discusses the example of preparing his tenth-grade students to take their high school exit exam.⁷⁶ He felt confident in his students' abilities and that he had prepared them well for the essay.⁷⁷ However, he failed to

⁶³ Ember Smith & Richard Reeves, *SAT Math Scores Mirror and Maintain Racial Inequality*, BROOKINGS: BLOG (Dec. 1, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/12/01/sat-math-scores-mirror-and-maintain-racial-inequity/>.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ Young Whan Choi, *How to Address Racial Bias in Standardized Testing*, NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CHALLENGES (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/racial-bias-standardized-testing>.

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ Samuel R. Hodge et al., *A Comparison of High School Students' Stereotypic Beliefs about Intelligence and Athleticism*, 22 J. EDUC. FOUND. 99 (2008).

⁷¹ *How Stereotypes Undermine Test Scores*, S. POVERTY L. CTR. LEARNING FOR JUST., <https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/how-stereotypes-undermine-test-scores> (last visited Oct. 12, 2023).

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ Choi, *supra* note 66.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

realize that many of his students could not understand the prompt of the essay itself.⁷⁸ The students were asked to write about a person who deserved a “key to the city”; however, many of the lower-income students in his class had never heard that phrase before.⁷⁹ While this example was not a college admissions exam, Choi makes it clear that the same kinds of assumptions are made in almost all standardized tests, whether intended or not.⁸⁰ He draws attention to test-makers’ reliance on white middle-class students’ knowledge without considering those of other races or socioeconomic status.⁸¹

In 2019, lawsuits were filed on behalf of the Compton Unified School District against the University of California.⁸² The lawsuit claimed that standardized tests are biased and discriminate against lower-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities.⁸³ One of the lawsuits noted, “Rather than fulfilling its vision as an ‘engine of opportunity for all Californians’ . . . UC requires all applicants to subject themselves to SAT and ACT tests that are demonstrably discriminatory against the State’s least privileged students, the very students who would most benefit from higher education.”⁸⁴ The lawsuits demanded that University of California stop requiring both the ACT and SAT for admissions, arguing that the requirement violated the equal protection guarantees of the California Constitution.⁸⁵ In 2021, the University settled and agreed to extend test-free admissions through 2025.⁸⁶

On the other hand, others believe that tests are not to blame for the racial disparities in their results.⁸⁷ Instead, they conclude the disproportionate test results are the product of broader systematic failures within our education system.⁸⁸ These failures go back much earlier than the college admissions process.⁸⁹ During

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² Teresa Watanabe, *UC Violates Civil Rights of Disadvantaged Students by Requiring SAT for Admission Lawsuits Say*, L.A. TIMES (Dec. 10, 2019, 4:35 PM), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-12-10/uc-violates-civil-rights-of-disadvantaged-students-by-requiring-sat-for-admission-lawsuit-alleges>.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Maeve Allsup, *University of California Agrees to Drop SAT, ACT Score Use*, BLOOMBERG L. (May 14, 2021, 5:22 PM), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/university-of-california-agrees-to-drop-sat-act-in-admissions>.

⁸⁷ Linda Darling-Hammond, *Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Students of Color in America*, in *THE RIGHT THING TO DO, THE SMART THING TO DO* 208, 208–33 (Nat’l Academies Press, 2001).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

elementary and high school, students of color from disadvantaged communities are less likely to receive course work that meets grade appropriate standards, reflects higher cognitive demand, and is meaningfully engaging.⁹⁰ This is largely due to the fact that schools made up predominantly of students of color usually have lower quality or fewer resources than schools made up predominantly of white students, even within the same school district.⁹¹ These schools also do not have equally stable teacher workforces, as students of color are more likely to attend schools where over fifty percent of teachers were absent for over ten days.⁹²

IV. ERADICATING STANDARDIZED TESTS WILL SERVE TO INCREASE SOCIOECONOMIC BARRIERS

I concur with this view and argue that standardized tests themselves are not biased. Consequently, eradicating standardized tests will not solve issues of inequity in the college admissions process but will serve to increase socioeconomic barriers amongst prospective students. As previously discussed, most universities did not require standardized test scores for their applications during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹³ This is still the case for many universities today, even though testing centers have reopened.⁹⁴ As a result, admissions offices have placed a greater emphasis on other components of student applications.⁹⁵ This includes a student's extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, resume, personal essays, and interviews.⁹⁶ According to Professor Thomas J. Kane of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, this emphasis on other application materials can cause an increase in inequality amongst students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.⁹⁷ Professor Kane noted that "[e]ven though SAT scores are correlated with family background, family income, they are less correlated with family background than some of these other measures that colleges would have to rely on in a world with no test scores."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ U.S. DEP'T EDUC. OFF. CIV. RTS., 2013-2014 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION A FIRST LOOK, 6-7 (Oct. 28, 2016), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.

⁹¹ Darling-Hammond, *supra* note 87.

⁹² U.S. DEP'T EDUC. OFF. CIV. RTS., *supra* note 90.

⁹³ Jaschik, *supra* note 10.

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ Ethan S. Ake-Little, *In Defense of Standardized Testing in Admissions*, THE CHRON. HIGHER EDUC. (Feb.

10, 2019), <https://www.chronicle.com/article/in-defense-of-standardized-testing-in-admissions/>.

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ Paton D. Roberts, *HGSE Experts Split on Benefits of Standardized Testing*, HARV. CRIMSON (Mar. 1, 2022), <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/3/1/hgse-split-standardized-testing/#:~:text=Despite%20a%20national%20move%20away,admissions%20and%20K%2D12%20education.>

⁹⁸ *Id.*

A. Parental Advantage

One reason why eliminating standardized tests will increase socioeconomic barriers is parental advantage. Put simply, “parental advantage” is the idea that parents generally try to give their children as many advantages in life as they can.⁹⁹ These advantages can take on many forms. For instance, many parents choose to assist their children financially.¹⁰⁰ This could mean providing money for their child to purchase a car, attend higher education, rent their first apartment, or start a business. Having a parent to pay for or provide financial assistance with any of these things can be a huge advantage over a child who does not have the same opportunity.

However, parental advantages do not have to be financial. Parents can utilize their connections to give their child an advantage over their competition for college admissions, job interviews, and more.¹⁰¹ For college admissions, this connection could be a parent being an alumnus of the school their child wants to attend.¹⁰² Particularly in the Ivy League, universities often give preference to legacy students.¹⁰³ For 2022 admissions, fourteen percent of the freshmen at Yale were the child of a Yale University graduate.¹⁰⁴ The legacy preferences mostly benefit white applicants who are usually already very well-connected and wealthy thanks to their parents.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, even without alumni status, parents can still utilize connections with any faculty, professors, and members of the board to give their child a leg up over the competition during college admissions.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, there are other types of advantages parents can give their children simply by where they choose to live.¹⁰⁷ Parents can live in a neighborhood that offers their child multiple advantages, including safety, resources, and social opportunities.¹⁰⁸ The neighborhood where a child grows up controls who the child

⁹⁹ JOSEPH FISHKIN, *BOTTLENECKS: A NEW THEORY OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY* 48–56 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at 48.

¹⁰¹ Stephanie Saul, *Elite Colleges’ Quiet Fight to Favor Alumni Children*, N. Y. TIMES (Oct. 31, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/us/legacy-admissions-colleges-universities.html>.

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ Max Larkin & Mayowa Aina, *Legacy Admissions Offer An Advantage — And Not Just At Schools Like Harvard*, NPR (Nov. 4, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/663629750/legacy-admissions-offer-an-advantage-and-not-just-at-schools-like-harvard>.

¹⁰⁴ Saul, *supra* note 101.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Fry & Laura Newberry, *The Legal Way the Rich Get Their Kids Into Elite Colleges: Huge Donations for Years*, L.A. TIMES (Mar. 22, 2019), <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-college-admissions-scandal-legal-ways-20190318-story>.

¹⁰⁷ FISHKIN, *supra* note 99, at 49.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

interacts and plays with.¹⁰⁹ Children who have the opportunity to interact with privileged families can develop a network that offers an abundance of opportunities.¹¹⁰ In deciding where to live, parents can also choose where their child attends school.¹¹¹ This could mean relocating to different cities or neighborhoods in order to place their child in the best school available.¹¹² The highest ranking schools often have a more advantaged student population, better teacher-to-student ratios, and more resources available for students.¹¹³

Lastly, parents can provide developmental advantages for their children. Children develop their basic social skills and other essential capacities from early interaction with their parents.¹¹⁴ Parents who choose to take the time to read to their children while they are young will give them a substantial advantage over other children in school, particularly in terms of their vocabulary.¹¹⁵ As they get older, children can benefit from interacting with their parents intellectually.¹¹⁶ Through their love and interactions, parents can ultimately instill a strong sense of self-worth in their children.¹¹⁷ It can be very difficult to view a parent reading to their child before bed or telling their child “I love you” as an advantage. As Professor Joseph Fishkin notes, “[t]he advantages all these parental acts provide are so obvious that it seems awkward, perhaps even perverse, to view some of them as special advantages rather than simply as good parenting.”¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, not all children will receive the same love, care, and attention as others.¹¹⁹ Awkward or not, these parental acts can provide children with advantages over their peers.¹²⁰ Thus, children begin life comparatively unequal to other children based solely on their circumstances of birth.¹²¹

The question then is if anything can be done to reduce the extent of these inequalities. In his book, Professor Fishkin states the obvious but impossible

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ *Public and Private School Comparisons*, NAT’L CTR. FOR EDUC. STAT., <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=55> (last visited Oct. 17, 2023); *Table 208.20. Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Teachers, Enrollment, Pupil/Teacher Ratios, and New Teacher Hires: Selected Years, Fall 1955 Through Fall 2030*, NAT’L CTR. FOR EDUC. STAT., https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_208.20.asp (last visited Oct. 17, 2023).

¹¹⁴ FISHKIN, *supra* note 99, at 49.

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

¹¹⁸ *Id.*

¹¹⁹ *Id.* at 48.

¹²⁰ *Id.*

¹²¹ *Id.* at 51.

solution: to eliminate the institution of family.¹²² If each child were taken away from their parents at birth and raised in the exact same circumstances, perhaps it would be possible for every child to have equal opportunities.¹²³ However, this is not a viable solution.¹²⁴ Not only would it be impossible, but there are significant reasons to allow families to continue.¹²⁵ Families are the foundation of civilization.¹²⁶ Families are responsible for socializing children, providing “practical and emotional support,” and giving their members a social identity.¹²⁷ Beyond the many benefits, eliminating the institution of family would violate a person’s basic freedom and choice to have a family.¹²⁸

Philosophers Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift argue instead that the parental advantage should be limited, rather than eliminated altogether.¹²⁹ While parents can confer many different advantages to their children, Brighouse and Swift believe parents should only be able to confer advantages that are fundamental to the parent-child relationship.¹³⁰ In other words, these are advantages that occur as a result of developing an intimate relationship with a child.¹³¹ Thus, their argument is that these advantages should continue, but all others should be limited in an attempt to decrease inequality.¹³² As author J. Kessa Roberts points out, there is a clear tension in this argument between the good of decreasing inequality and the value of family.¹³³ I agree with Roberts' conclusion that the argument for limitation does not warrant the resulting restriction on parental liberty.¹³⁴

Fishkin suggests other ideas for mitigating the inequalities of parental advantage but concludes that none adequately justify the intrusion they would cause into such a private sphere of life.¹³⁵ He proposes assistance from the State in the form of special programs for less advantaged children specifically or to all children on a mass scale.¹³⁶ Examples include developmental programs offered to disadvantaged children, mandatory pre-school, or universal healthcare for

¹²² *Id.* at 50.

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ STEVEN E. BARKAN, *SOCIOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGING THE SOCIAL WORLD* 428 (3d ed. 2021).

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ FISHKIN, *supra* note 99, at 50.

¹²⁹ J. Kessa Roberts, *The Ethics of Conferring Parental Advantage: A Question of Parental Liberty Versus Societal Equality*, 47 *PHIL. STUD. EDUC.* 140–48 (2016).

¹³⁰ *Id.* at 140.

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² *Id.* at 146.

¹³³ *Id.*

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ FISHKIN, *supra* note 99, at 51.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

minors.¹³⁷ Fishkin notes that while these programs could be very useful, they still would not be enough to neutralize the inequalities created by parental advantage.¹³⁸ Further, the results of these programs are insufficient to warrant the state intruding and controlling family life.¹³⁹ He concludes that "[u]nless we are willing to destroy the family and move to a system of collective child rearing, like the one contemplated in Plato's Republic or in mythologized versions of early Israeli kibbutz experiments, life chances will never be completely independent of circumstances of birth."¹⁴⁰

Consequently, parental advantage will continue to result in inequalities starting at a very young age. The idea that eradicating standardized tests will solve the inequalities in the college admissions process is not a feasible one. In fact, eradicating standardized tests will likely lead to an increased inequality amongst prospective students. One of the biggest arguments against standardized testing is that more affluent parents can afford expensive test preparation courses and tutors for their children.¹⁴¹ However, this does not mean that less advantaged students cannot perform well on the exam. The goal of the test is to put students as close to an equal footing as possible by testing everyone under identical conditions.¹⁴² Moreover, the SAT has been shown time and time again to accurately measure a student's ability to succeed in college.¹⁴³ A study from the University of California found that students with low SAT scores were approximately two to five times more likely to drop out of college after one year.¹⁴⁴ They are also three times more likely not to complete their degree.¹⁴⁵ A poor student with a high test score is more likely to succeed and complete their degree than a wealthy student with a lower score.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, eradicating standardized tests would only serve to increase socioeconomic barriers amongst students.¹⁴⁷ In my opinion, parental advantage will play a much larger role in the admissions process without standardized tests. While test preparation is available for wealthier students, less affluent students can still succeed on merit alone.¹⁴⁸ Eliminating standardized tests would cause admissions to rely on other aspects of a student's application such as personal essays, letters of

¹³⁷ *Id.*

¹³⁸ *Id.*

¹³⁹ *Id.*

¹⁴⁰ *Id.* at 53.

¹⁴¹ Fry & Newberry, *supra* note 106.

¹⁴² Tunnell, *supra* note 14.

¹⁴³ Preston Cooper, *Abandoning the SAT Won't Help Disadvantaged Students*, NAT'L REV. (May 21, 2021, 6:30 AM), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/05/abandoning-the-sat-wont-help-disadvantaged-students/>.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

recommendation, and extracurricular activities.¹⁴⁹ These other aspects are much easier to manipulate by more affluent students and their parents.¹⁵⁰ A study of 240,000 admissions essays found that the correlation between superior essays and family income was higher than the correlation between SAT scores and family income.¹⁵¹ Parents can hire coaches to assist their children in preparing their admissions essay or hire someone to write it on their child's behalf.¹⁵² This is not a possibility with standardized testing due to the identification measures they have in place. Regarding extracurricular activities, lower income students cannot afford the lavish options available to their peers.¹⁵³ Music lessons, volunteer trips, and sports can all be extremely expensive.¹⁵⁴ Even school clubs often require fees to join.¹⁵⁵ It would be difficult for the application of a less advantaged student to compare to those with a list of impressive extracurricular activities.¹⁵⁶ While parental advantage exists in standardized test preparation, it would seemingly play a much larger role in applications with no standardized tests scores. However, any student, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can study vocabulary and mathematical reasoning.¹⁵⁷

B. Housing Segregation and Underprivileged Schools

Housing segregation is another reason eradicating standardized testing will increase socioeconomic barriers. The landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* ordered the desegregation of public schools over sixty years ago.¹⁵⁸ The ruling declared that equal education for all students was not possible so long as schools remained segregated by race.¹⁵⁹ Thurgood Marshall, the attorney who argued the case, believed desegregation could be achieved within five years

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ *Id.*

¹⁵⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵⁵ Sadhvi Mathur, *Affordable and Free High School Extracurricular Activities*, COLLEGEVINE: BLOG (Nov. 17, 2020), <https://blog.collegevine.com/affordable-high-school-extracurricular-activities#:~:text=However%2C%20even%20the%20little%20costs,of%20which%20are%20not%20cheap.>

¹⁵⁶ Cooper, *supra* note 143.

¹⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁵⁸ Emily Badger, *Housing Segregation is Holding Back the Promise of Brown v. Board of Education*, WASH. POST (May 15, 2014, 8:30 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/05/15/housing-segregation-is-holding-back-the-promise-of-brown-v-board-of-education/>.

¹⁵⁹ *Id.*

after the Court's decision.¹⁶⁰ However, sixty years later, schools in America have not been truly integrated as the Court intended.¹⁶¹ What desegregation did occur following *Brown* has been slowly disappearing since the 1970s.¹⁶² These disappointing results have nothing to do with the education system itself, but are instead a consequence of de facto housing segregation.¹⁶³

The desegregation of public schools seemed attainable in the 1950s, when Black and white students lived close to one another.¹⁶⁴ Before desegregation, students who lived within blocks of each other were being bussed to different schools based on their race.¹⁶⁵ The solution was simply to create school zones and send all students within a certain zone to the same school.¹⁶⁶ Now, however, white and minority students find themselves again in seemingly segregated schools because of de facto housing segregation.¹⁶⁷ This is largely attributed to the white middle-class move to the suburbs during the 1970s.¹⁶⁸ White Americans had the opportunity to utilize federal lending programs and purchase new homes outside of central cities.¹⁶⁹ While the 1968 Fair Housing Act made racial discrimination in housing—including redlining—illegal, there was little to no enforcement of the law.¹⁷⁰ Further, although the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity banned racial discrimination in mortgage lending, some claim that it also failed to eliminate racial discrimination in housing.¹⁷¹ By choosing to move outside of city limits, these white middle-class families were beyond bussing and zoning policies that were created to desegregate school districts.¹⁷² What resulted was school districts with higher poverty levels, concentrated minority groups, and declining property values.¹⁷³

Today, de facto housing segregation and segregation in schools remains relevant.¹⁷⁴ Data from Rutgers University Professor Paul Jargowsky displays the "index of dissimilarity" between white and minority students, as well as non-poor

¹⁶⁰ *Id.*

¹⁶¹ *Id.*

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ *Id.*

¹⁶⁴ *Id.*

¹⁶⁵ Harmeet Kaur, *What You Need to Know About Bussing*, CNN (June 30, 2019, 8:57 AM) <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/29/politics/what-is-busing-explainer-trnd/index.html>.

¹⁶⁶ *Id.*

¹⁶⁷ Badger, *supra* note 158.

¹⁶⁸ *Id.*

¹⁶⁹ GEORGE R. METCALF, *FAIR HOUSING COMES OF AGE* 106 (1988).

¹⁷⁰ *Id.* at 86.

¹⁷¹ John H. Matheson, *The Equal Credit Opportunity Act: A Functional Failure*, 21 HARV. J. ON LEGIS. 372 (1984).

¹⁷² Badger, *supra* note 158.

¹⁷³ *Id.*

¹⁷⁴ *Id.*

and poor students.¹⁷⁵ The data measures the isolation of two different groups, with a score of 0 being total integration and 1 being total segregation.¹⁷⁶ For white and Black students in America, the data revealed a score of 0.7-0.8 for Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten students.¹⁷⁷ White and Latino students received a score of 0.6-0.7, and poor and non-poor students received a score of 0.5-0.6.¹⁷⁸ The segregation between white and minority and poor and non-poor students was highest for Pre-K and Kindergarten children.¹⁷⁹ These results are extremely discouraging considering this is the very outcome the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* was trying to prevent.¹⁸⁰

According to Rucker Johnson, an associate professor at the University of California Berkeley, housing policy must be a part of the solution of the inequalities in our education system.¹⁸¹ School policies cannot reach from a high-poverty area to a neighboring school district with better resources and higher test scores.¹⁸² Consequently, it seems the solutions to the education inequality are deeply rooted in housing patterns and segregation.¹⁸³ Johnson makes clear that by tracing the achievement gaps of lower-income children, you will find gaps in the places where they live.¹⁸⁴ In lower-income communities, schools often cannot compensate and retain good teachers, and also receive less property taxes for funding.¹⁸⁵ The classrooms within these schools have less parental involvement and more single-parent households.¹⁸⁶ These communities are also high in crime and environmental hazards, preventing children from playing outside.¹⁸⁷ Lastly, lower-income communities commonly lack important resources like job opportunities, mentors, and primary-care doctors.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, it is clear to see how housing segregation and unprivileged schools can create an unfair advantage for higher-income students compared to their lower-income peers. Housing segregation has resulted in segregation in schools between white students and minority students, as well as poor and non-poor students.¹⁸⁹ By moving homes, more affluent parents can place their children in

¹⁷⁵ *Id.*

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷⁷ *Id.*

¹⁷⁸ *Id.*

¹⁷⁹ *Id.*

¹⁸⁰ *Id.*

¹⁸¹ *Id.*

¹⁸² *Id.*

¹⁸³ *Id.*

¹⁸⁴ *Id.*

¹⁸⁵ *Id.*

¹⁸⁶ *Id.*

¹⁸⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸⁸ *Id.*

¹⁸⁹ *Id.*

specific schools.¹⁹⁰ These schools have better teachers, easier access to resources, and more opportunities.¹⁹¹ This is a stark comparison to underprivileged schools, which sometimes do not have enough desks for the number of students.¹⁹² Underprivileged schools do not have the resources to maintain an adequate number of teachers or purchase books, let alone money to put towards extracurricular opportunities for students.¹⁹³ By eliminating standardized testing, a heavier weight will be placed on other aspects of the application such as extracurricular activities, transcripts, and letters of recommendation.¹⁹⁴ Standardized testing provides a better way for students, regardless of background, to compete with one another on an equal footing.¹⁹⁵ Thus, eliminating standardized tests will increase socioeconomic barriers amongst students.

C. Increased Implicit Bias in Decision Making

Additionally, eradicating standardized tests will increase socioeconomic barriers because it will cause increased implicit bias in college admissions decision making. Implicit bias is commonly referred to as unconscious bias.¹⁹⁶ As humans, we process millions of pieces of information each second.¹⁹⁷ According to neuroscientists, most of that processing occurs outside of our conscious awareness.¹⁹⁸ Implicit biases are an example of a mental association that occurs unconsciously.¹⁹⁹ Defined more specifically, implicit biases are prejudices that are present but not consciously held or recognized.²⁰⁰ This means that a person's implicit biases do not have to necessarily align with their conscious intentions or beliefs.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, even individuals who try to treat everyone fairly can still act in a way that demonstrates their implicit biases.²⁰²

Despite being both unconscious and involuntary, implicit biases can play a huge role in an individual's decision making.²⁰³ According to social science studies, implicit biases can be triggered by several different attributes we recognize in

¹⁹⁰ FISHKIN, *supra* note 99, at 49.

¹⁹¹ Ake-Little, *supra* note 95.

¹⁹² *Id.*

¹⁹³ *Id.*

¹⁹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁹⁶ Cheryl Staats, *Understanding Implicit Bias*, 39 AM. EDUCATOR 29, 29 (2015).

¹⁹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁹⁸ *Id.* at 30.

¹⁹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰⁰ *Id.*

²⁰¹ *Id.*

²⁰² *Id.*

²⁰³ *Id.*

others.²⁰⁴ Examples of these attributes are race, gender, age, and ethnicity.²⁰⁵ Research shows that there are certain conditions in which individuals choose to rely on their unconscious associations in order to make decisions.²⁰⁶ Two of these conditions are situations involving ambiguous or incomplete information and the presence of time constraints.²⁰⁷ An example of an individual having both ambiguous or incomplete information and a time constraint is a college admissions officer. Unfortunately, without standardized tests providing a numeric system to judge candidates on, college admissions officers are forced to use more subjective measures, such as personal essays, extracurricular activities, resumes, and interviews. These measures provide a greater opportunity for an admissions officer's implicit bias to affect their decision making than comparing prospective students' test scores.

Quinn Capers IV, a physician and professor holding the Rody P. Cox, M.D., Professorship in Internal Medicine at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, recounted the implicit biases of a colleague during a medical school interview.²⁰⁸ The interviewer was a "veteran" of the university's admissions committee and a professor at the university.²⁰⁹ He prided himself on being a caring educator and professional.²¹⁰ The student in this instance was a young, African American male who had researched the university, reviewed his application, and completed mock interviews in preparation.²¹¹ During the interview, the professor asked the prospective student typical questions.²¹² From his perspective, the interview was normal.²¹³ However, the student noted that the professor looked uncomfortable and did not engage in small talk during any part of the interview.²¹⁴ Moreover, the student felt that the interviewer cut off his answers and made less eye contact than the other interviewers present.²¹⁵

Despite what were likely good intentions, the interviewer in this case was influenced by his implicit biases.²¹⁶ Perhaps it was when he read the student's name

²⁰⁴ *Id.*

²⁰⁵ *Id.*

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

²⁰⁸ Quinn Capers IV, *Rooting Out Implicit Bias in Admissions*, AAMC (Feb. 9, 2019), <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/insights/rooting-out-implicit-bias-admissions>; Quinn Capers, M.D., UT SW. FAC. DIRECTORY, <https://profiles.utsouthwestern.edu/profile/198323/quinn-capers.html> (last visited Oct. 30, 2023).

²⁰⁹ Capers IV, *supra* note 208.

²¹⁰ *Id.*

²¹¹ *Id.*

²¹² *Id.*

²¹³ *Id.*

²¹⁴ *Id.*

²¹⁵ *Id.*

²¹⁶ *Id.*

on the application or after he saw the student in person that he unconsciously made associations based on his race.²¹⁷ This particular type of implicit bias is referred to as “implicit white race preference.”²¹⁸ Individuals with implicit white race preference unknowingly associate white people with positive words or feelings, and associate Black people with negative words or feelings.²¹⁹ Unfortunately, this type of implicit bias is very common.²²⁰ Of several million volunteers who took an implicit bias association test, seventy percent displayed an implicit white race preference.²²¹ In 2012, The Ohio State University College of Medicine admissions committee took implicit association tests.²²² The results displayed several types of implicit bias including white race preference, implicit bias against LGBTQ+ individuals, and an implicit association with males and “career” and women with “homemaker.”²²³

Other studies display the impact implicit biases have in the college admissions process.²²⁴ When interviewing the African American student in the example from Professor Capers, the interviewer displayed an implicit bias.²²⁵ This implicit bias could have been from reading the student’s name on the application or from seeing him in-person for the interview.²²⁶ Research has shown that students with “ethnic-sounding names” are less likely to be selected than those with traditionally “white-sounding names.”²²⁷ Moreover, admissions officers typically evaluate minority students’ personal essays much harsher than those of white applicants.²²⁸ Without standardized testing, college admissions officers must rely on these more subjective measures in order to select students for admission.²²⁹ In doing so, colleges are opening the door for admissions committees’ implicit biases to potentially bar qualified applicants from admission.²³⁰

²¹⁷ *Id.*

²¹⁸ *Id.*

²¹⁹ *Id.*

²²⁰ *Id.*

²²¹ *Id.*

²²² *Id.*

²²³ *Id.*

²²⁴ *Id.*

²²⁵ *Id.*

²²⁶ *Id.*

²²⁷ *Id.*

²²⁸ *Id.*

²²⁹ Kathryn Paige Harden, *The SAT Isn’t What’s Unfair*, THE ATLANTIC (Apr. 2, 2022), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/mit-admissions-reinstates-sat-act-tests/629455/>.

²³⁰ Capers IV, *supra* note 208.

D. The Opportunity for Merit-Based Financial Aid

Lastly, eradicating standardized testing requirements for college admissions will increase socioeconomic barriers amongst prospective students because of a lack of opportunity to receive merit-based financial aid.²³¹ Suppose a disadvantaged student is selected for admission despite standardized testing no longer being a requirement.²³² Unfortunately, this student's socioeconomic barriers will not disappear after admission.²³³ These students must rely on financial aid more than their privileged peers.²³⁴ Without standardized testing, it is likely that underprivileged students will be at a disadvantage when being considered to receive scholarships.²³⁵

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities across the United States are no longer requiring standardized test scores for admission.²³⁶ Before this, scores on the SAT and ACT were the primary factors in determining which prospective students would receive merit-based financial aid.²³⁷ Now, it appears that many universities are choosing to rely on a student's academic performance for scholarship decisions.²³⁸ Unfortunately, basing scholarship decisions on high school GPA will bar many underprivileged students from receiving aid they desperately need.²³⁹

According to the 2019 Niche College Applicant Survey, lower income students, specifically those with a household income of less than \$44,000, were only half as likely to have a GPA over 4.0 when compared to their more affluent peers.²⁴⁰ Moreover, these disadvantaged students were nine times as likely to have a GPA under 2.5.²⁴¹ As previously discussed, higher income students often have a

²³¹ Harden, *supra* note 229.

²³² Ake-Little, *supra* note 95.

²³³ *Id.*

²³⁴ *Id.*

²³⁵ *Id.*

²³⁶ Churchill, *supra* note 55.

²³⁷ Joanna Nesbit, *How Will Students Get College Scholarships if They Can't Take the SAT?*, MONEY (Oct. 19, 2020) <https://money.com/college-scholarships-sat-tests-canceled/>.

²³⁸ *Id.*

²³⁹ Alex Engler, *Enrollment Algorithms Are Contributing to the Crises of Higher Education*, BROOKINGS (Sept. 14, 2021) <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/enrollment-algorithms-are-contributing-to-the-crises-of-higher-education/>.

²⁴⁰ Will Patch, *Serving Low Income Students: Insights from the 2019 Niche College Applicant Survey of Student Confidence and Concerns*, NICHE (Mar. 9, 2020), <https://www.niche.com/about/enrollment-insights/serving-low-income-students-insights-from-the-2019-niche-college-applicant-survey-of-student-confidence-and-concerns/>.

²⁴¹ *Id.*

great advantage over their less affluent peers in terms of their K-12 education.²⁴² Schools with a wealthier student population have better teachers, offer more advanced courses and extracurricular activities, and have more resources overall.²⁴³ Now, it appears that more affluent students have grade inflation as another advantage based on the high school they attended.²⁴⁴

A new study has shown that schools with a wealthier student population had a significant median GPA increase from 2005 to 2016.²⁴⁵ Seth Gershensen, an associate professor at American University who conducted the research, explained, “[i]n other words, it’s gotten easier to get a good grade in more affluent schools, but not in less affluent ones.”²⁴⁶ While researchers have been comparing GPA to test scores for several years, these studies have been limited to small pools of students.²⁴⁷ By looking at all public schools in a particular state, Professor Gershensen was the first to draw conclusions about grade inflation between poor and non-poor students.²⁴⁸ During the course of the study, more affluent schools and less affluent schools experienced very different trends.²⁴⁹ For instance, in 2010, the probability of receiving an A in a wealthier school increased significantly.²⁵⁰ Meanwhile, in 2013, the probability of receiving an A in a poorer school decreased significantly.²⁵¹ Moreover, Gershensen’s analysis on ACT scores and data also shows grade inflation accelerating from 2011 forward, primarily in schools with advantaged students.²⁵²

Unfortunately, for lower income students, there is often a gap between cost of attendance and available financial aid.²⁵³ According to the study “Shutting Low-Income Students Out of Public Four-Year Higher Education,” the average Pell Grant recipient would only be able to afford 139 out of 551 four-year public universities in the United States.²⁵⁴ The study looked at the cost of attending over five-hundred public universities and factored in the average Pell Grant a student

²⁴² Lauren Camera, *Another Advantage for Wealthy Students*, U.S. NEWS (Sept. 19, 2018), <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2018-09-19/the-gpa-gap-rich-students-have-grades-inflated-more-often-than-poor-students>.

²⁴³ *Id.*

²⁴⁴ *Id.*

²⁴⁵ *Id.*

²⁴⁶ *Id.*

²⁴⁷ *Id.*

²⁴⁸ *Id.*

²⁴⁹ *Id.*

²⁵⁰ *Id.*

²⁵¹ *Id.*

²⁵² *Id.*

²⁵³ *Why Scholarships Are Vital for Low-Income Students and Families*, SCHOLARSHIP AM.: BLOG, <https://scholarshipamerica.org/blog/why-scholarships-are-vital-for-low-income-students-and-families/> (last visited Dec. 5, 2022).

²⁵⁴ *Id.*

received, as well as the average financial loans taken.²⁵⁵ These students are being priced out of attending college, but scholarships and merit-based aid can help to fill that gap.²⁵⁶ Unfortunately, without a standardized testing requirement, high school GPA becomes the primary consideration for scholarships.²⁵⁷ As a result, disadvantaged students will have a much harder time filling the gap between cost of attendance and financial aid.²⁵⁸

V. THE ISSUE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AMONGST STUDENTS

It is true that there are both racial and wealth disparities within standardized test results. Minority students tend to perform worse than their white peers, and poor students tend to perform worse than their more affluent peers.²⁵⁹ While there is correlation, there does not appear to be causation. In other words, it is not standardized tests that are causing these disparities.²⁶⁰ Instead, standardized tests are merely reflecting the inequities of an unfair society.²⁶¹ The SAT in particular was designed to measure a student's ability to write clear sentences, understand complex passages, and solve math problems.²⁶² While an inequality in academic skills amongst these particular groups is apparent, the test is not creating these inequalities but is revealing them.²⁶³

The issue thus is not a biased test but one of equal opportunity amongst prospective students.²⁶⁴ While critics of standardized testing point to more affluent students' access to test preparation, they miss the larger issue at hand.²⁶⁵ These more affluent students are the "beneficiaries of lifelong inequalities" in opportunity and education.²⁶⁶ The inequalities start much earlier than college admissions, and arguably go back to circumstances of birth.²⁶⁷ According to the University of Texas' Developmental Behavior Genetics Lab, children as young as two years old who come from lower income families differ from their more affluent peers on

²⁵⁵ *Id.*

²⁵⁶ *Id.*

²⁵⁷ *Id.*

²⁵⁸ *Id.*

²⁵⁹ Dan Hardy, *How Race and Class Relate to Standardized Tests*, CHALKBEAT PHILA. (Nov. 24, 2015, 4:47 AM), <https://philadelphia.chalkbeat.org/2015/11/24/22182645/how-race-and-class-relate-to-standardized-tests>.

²⁶⁰ Harden, *supra* note 229.

²⁶¹ *Id.*

²⁶² *Id.*

²⁶³ *Id.*

²⁶⁴ *Id.*

²⁶⁵ *Id.*

²⁶⁶ *Id.*

²⁶⁷ *Id.*

standardized tests.²⁶⁸ Poverty and racism can play an extremely harmful role in a child’s learning, even to the extent of harming their brain development.²⁶⁹

Consequently, eliminating standardized tests will not create an equal opportunity for all prospective college students.²⁷⁰ As clinical-psychology professor Kathryn Paige Harden notes, eradicating standardized testing will not eradicate the “inequitable policies” that “systematically deprive” children of safe neighborhoods, better teachers, nutritious food, and clean water.²⁷¹ Rather than solving the issue of equal opportunity, getting rid of standardized tests will actually deprive us of the tool for seeing the results of our current “inequitable policies” and systematic failures.²⁷² Without standardized tests, these issues will become much harder to recognize and solve.²⁷³

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, eradicating standardized testing for college admissions will increase socioeconomic barriers for underprivileged students. Standardized tests provide the best opportunity for students from different backgrounds to compete with one another at an equal footing. Eliminating the requirement of standardized tests causes more emphasis to be placed on other components of a student’s application. These components tend to be much more subjective than a numerical score and can be more easily influenced by implicit biases. Eliminating standardized testing does not eliminate the issues of parental advantage, housing segregation, and underprivileged schools. While there can never truly be equal opportunity, standardized tests provide the most objective measure for college admissions when compared to personal essays, interviews, letters of recommendation, GPA, and extracurricular activities. Consequently, our focus should be on what efforts can be made to remedy the systemic failures within our education system and our society as a whole, rather than on standardized testing, which merely serves as a reflection of these injustices.

²⁶⁸ *Id.*

²⁶⁹ *Id.*

²⁷⁰ *Id.*

²⁷¹ *Id.*

²⁷² *Id.*

²⁷³ *Id.*