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The Trend Towards Eradicating Standardized Tests for College Admissions Will Increase Socioeconomic Barriers for Underprivileged Students

Shelby Batson
shelbats@vols.utk.edu

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

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

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2 Id.
4 Id.
5 Id.
9 Id.
testing centers to take the ACT or SAT. As COVID-19 restrictions and mandates lifted, many universities chose not to start requiring test scores again. Instead, they are relying on the other components of students’ applications for admission decisions. 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. The goal of the standardized test is to provide the examiner with objective results that can be easily compared. The first known standardized test was administered in imperial China in the third century B.C.E. The exam was designed to determine qualified candidates to serve the emperor and his family. It covered several subjects, including horsemanship, music, calligraphy, arithmetic, and ceremonial knowledge. As time passed, more subjects were added to the test, including civil law, agriculture, poetry, and geography. In fact, the emperor often chose the material for the exams and would examine the final remaining candidates himself.

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

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11 Hubler, supra note 7.
12 Lorin, supra note 3.
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.
population, largely due to improved sanitation practices and medical advancements. This increase in population, as well as a decreased need for child labor, afforded greater opportunity for more children to attend school. Consequently, the education system turned to standardized tests for an easy and efficient way to assess students.

Following the Industrial Revolution, the presidents of twelve leading universities at the time decided to form the College Entrance Examination Board in 1900. The goal of the Board was to standardize admissions and create a basic curriculum. One year later, the Board administered the first College Board exam. The exam tested specific subjects and was presented in essay format rather than multiple choice. Shortly after, in 1905, the first IQ test was created by psychologist Alfred Binet. Binet was tasked with creating a test for students who were falling behind in school. The test needed to determine whether remaining in the classroom would be beneficial for those students or if they needed special education. The final product was a thirty-question exam designed to measure each student’s mental age.

Standardized testing gained traction during its implementation to the military. During World War I, Robert Yerkes, a Harvard professor, was the first to suggest administering an IQ test to military recruits. Along with other prominent psychologists of the time, Yerkes developed the Army Alpha Examination. 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. This was the first time an IQ test had been administered on such a large scale.

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23 Fletcher, *supra* note 20.
24 Id.
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.\textsuperscript{38} After assisting with the military IQ test, Brigham published a book analyzing the results titled \textit{A Study of American Intelligence}.\textsuperscript{39} In his book, Brigham discussed the military recruits’ performances and categorized them based on race.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{41} After his book was published, Brigham decided to give students at Princeton University a version of the Army Alpha Examination.\textsuperscript{42} Consequently, the College Board placed Brigham in charge of developing a test that colleges could use uniformly for all admission decisions.\textsuperscript{43} Along with a committee of other Board members, Brigham created what is now referred to as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).\textsuperscript{44} The test was first administered to students in 1926, but it has been redesigned many times since its creation.\textsuperscript{45} Today, the SAT consists of three sections—reading, writing, and math—and students are given a total score ranging from 400 to 1600.\textsuperscript{46}

More than thirty years after the creation of the SAT, one professor decided to create a new college admissions exam.\textsuperscript{47} Everett Lindquist was an education professor at the University of Iowa.\textsuperscript{48} Lindquist had been an active participant in the development of standardized tests since the creation of the SAT.\textsuperscript{49} But he felt that the SAT was designed to evaluate a student’s theoretical reasoning skills rather than their actual knowledge.\textsuperscript{50} Lindquist also felt that testing the practical knowledge of students was a better representation of how they would perform at the collegiate level.\textsuperscript{51} Lindquist created the ACT along with Ted McCarrel, who was the University of Iowa’s registrar.\textsuperscript{52} The ACT today consists of math, science,
reading, and English sections. The first ACT was administered in 1959, and the test has continued to be a staple of the college admissions process since.

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. As previously stated, most universities stopped requiring standardized test scores during the pandemic as a safety precaution. 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. This decision seems to be largely motivated by the racial disparities found within both the SAT and ACT.

Statistically, Black students score lower than their white peers on tests designed to measure aptitude and intelligence. This is also true for standardized math, vocabulary, and reading tests. Studies show that this gap is first apparent when students are in kindergarten and worsens over time. 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. 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

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54 MANHATTAN REV., supra note 47.
56 Jaschik, supra note 10.
57 Coller, supra note 1.
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

64 Id.
65 Id.
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).
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. 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. 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. He draws attention to test-makers’ reliance on white middle-class students' knowledge without considering those of other races or socioeconomic status.

In 2019, lawsuits were filed on behalf of the Compton Unified School District against the University of California. The lawsuit claimed that standardized tests are biased and discriminate against lower-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities. 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." 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. In 2021, the University settled and agreed to extend test-free admissions through 2025.

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

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78 Id.
79 Id.
80 Id.
81 Id.
83 Id.
84 Id.
85 Id.
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. 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. 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.

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. This is still the case for many universities today, even though testing centers have reopened. As a result, admissions offices have placed a greater emphasis on other components of student applications. This includes a student's extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, resume, personal essays, and interviews. 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. 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."

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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.
96 Id.
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

100 Id. at 48.
102 Id.
104 Saul, supra note 101.
105 Id.
107 FISHKIN, supra note 99, at 49.
108 Id.
interacts and plays with. Children who have the opportunity to interact with privileged families can develop a network that offers an abundance of opportunities. In deciding where to live, parents can also choose where their child attends school. This could mean relocating to different cities or neighborhoods in order to place their child in the best school available. The highest ranking schools often have a more advantaged student population, better teacher-to-student ratios, and more resources available for students.

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. 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. As they get older, children can benefit from interacting with their parents intellectually. Through their love and interactions, parents can ultimately instill a strong sense of self-worth in their children. 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.” Unfortunately, not all children will receive the same love, care, and attention as others. Awkward or not, these parental acts can provide children with advantages over their peers. Thus, children begin life comparatively unequal to other children based solely on their circumstances of birth.

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

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109 Id.
110 Id.
111 Id.
112 Id.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{123} However, this is not a viable solution.\textsuperscript{124} Not only would it be impossible, but there are significant reasons to allow families to continue.\textsuperscript{125} Families are the foundation of civilization.\textsuperscript{126} Families are responsible for socializing children, providing “practical and emotional support,” and giving their members a social identity.\textsuperscript{127} Beyond the many benefits, eliminating the institution of family would violate a person’s basic freedom and choice to have a family.\textsuperscript{128}

Philosophers Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift argue instead that the parental advantage should be limited, rather than eliminated altogether.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{130} In other words, these are advantages that occur as a result of developing an intimate relationship with a child.\textsuperscript{131} Thus, their argument is that these advantages should continue, but all others should be limited in an attempt to decrease inequality.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{133} I agree with Roberts’ conclusion that the argument for limitation does not warrant the resulting restriction on parental liberty.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{136} Examples include developmental programs offered to disadvantaged children, mandatory pre-school, or universal healthcare for

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{122}] Id. at 50.
  \item[\textsuperscript{123}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{124}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{125}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{126}] STEVEN E. BARKAN, SOCIOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGING THE SOCIAL WORLD 428 (3d ed. 2021).
  \item[\textsuperscript{127}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{128}] FISHKIN, supra note 99, at 50.
  \item[\textsuperscript{130}] Id. at 140.
  \item[\textsuperscript{131}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{132}] Id. at 146.
  \item[\textsuperscript{133}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{134}] Id.
  \item[\textsuperscript{135}] FISHKIN, supra note 99, at 51.
  \item[\textsuperscript{136}] Id.
\end{itemize}
minors. Fishkin notes that while these programs could be very useful, they still would not be enough to neutralize the inequalities created by parental advantage. Further, the results of these programs are insufficient to warrant the state intruding and controlling family life. 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."

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. 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. Moreover, the SAT has been shown time and time again to accurately measure a student's ability to succeed in college. 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. They are also three times more likely not to complete their degree. 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.

Unfortunately, eradicating standardized tests would only serve to increase socioeconomic barriers amongst students. 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. Eliminating standardized tests would cause admissions to rely on other aspects of a student's application such as personal essays, letters of

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137 Id.
138 Id.
139 Id.
140 Id. at 53.
141 Fry & Newberry, supra note 106.
142 Tunnell, supra note 14.
144 Id.
145 Id.
146 Id.
147 Id.
148 Id.
recommendation, and extracurricular activities. These other aspects are much easier to manipulate by more affluent students and their parents. 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. Parents can hire coaches to assist their children in preparing their admissions essay or hire someone to write it on their child's behalf. 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. Music lessons, volunteer trips, and sports can all be extremely expensive. Even school clubs often require fees to join. It would be difficult for the application of a less advantaged student to compare to those with a list of impressive extracurricular activities. 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.

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. The ruling declared that equal education for all students was not possible so long as schools remained segregated by race. Thurgood Marshall, the attorney who argued the case, believed desegregation could be achieved within five years.

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

The desegregation of public schools seemed attainable in the 1950s, when Black and white students lived close to one another. Before desegregation, students who lived within blocks of each other were being bussed to different schools based on their race. The solution was simply to create school zones and send all students within a certain zone to the same school. Now, however, white and minority students find themselves again in seemingly segregated schools because of de facto housing segregation. This is largely attributed to the white middle-class move to the suburbs during the 1970s. White Americans had the opportunity to utilize federal lending programs and purchase new homes outside of central cities. While the 1968 Fair Housing Act made racial discrimination in housing—including redlining—illegal, there was little to no enforcement of the law. 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. 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. What resulted was school districts with higher poverty levels, concentrated minority groups, and declining property values.

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

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160 *Id.*
161 *Id.*
162 *Id.*
163 *Id.*
164 *Id.*
165 *Id.*
166 *Id.*
167 *Id.*
168 *Id.*
166 *Id.*
167 Badger, *supra* note 158.
168 *Id.*
169 *GEORGE R. METCALF, FAIR HOUSING COMES OF AGE 106 (1988).*
170 *Id.* at 86.
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

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\(^{175}\) *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. These schools have better teachers, easier access to resources, and more opportunities. This is a stark comparison to underprivileged schools, which sometimes do not have enough desks for the number of students. 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. 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. Standardized testing provides a better way for students, regardless of background, to compete with one another on an equal footing. 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. As humans, we process millions of pieces of information each second. According to neuroscientists, most of that processing occurs outside of our conscious awareness. Implicit biases are an example of a mental association that occurs unconsciously. Defined more specifically, implicit biases are prejudices that are present but not consciously held or recognized. This means that a person’s implicit biases do not have to necessarily align with their conscious intentions or beliefs. Unfortunately, even individuals who try to treat everyone fairly can still act in a way that demonstrates their implicit biases.

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

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190 Fishkin, supra note 99, at 49.
191 Ake-Little, supra note 95.
192 Id.
193 Id.
194 Id.
195 Id.
197 Id.
198 Id. at 30.
199 Id.
200 Id.
201 Id.
202 Id.
203 Id.
others. Examples of these attributes are race, gender, age, and ethnicity. Research shows that there are certain conditions in which individuals choose to rely on their unconscious associations in order to make decisions. Two of these conditions are situations involving ambiguous or incomplete information and the presence of time constraints. 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. The interviewer was a “veteran” of the university’s admissions committee and a professor at the university. He prided himself on being a caring educator and professional. 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. During the interview, the professor asked the prospective student typical questions. From his perspective, the interview was normal. However, the student noted that the professor looked uncomfortable and did not engage in small talk during any part of the interview. Moreover, the student felt that the interviewer cut off his answers and made less eye contact than the other interviewers present.

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

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204 Id.
205 Id.
206 Id.
207 Id.
209 Id., 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.\textsuperscript{217} This particular type of implicit bias is referred to as “implicit white race preference.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{219} Unfortunately, this type of implicit bias is very common.\textsuperscript{220} Of several million volunteers who took an implicit bias association test, seventy percent displayed an implicit white race preference.\textsuperscript{221} In 2012, The Ohio State University College of Medicine admissions committee took implicit association tests.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{223}

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

\textsuperscript{217} Id.
\textsuperscript{218} Id.
\textsuperscript{219} Id.
\textsuperscript{220} Id.
\textsuperscript{221} Id.
\textsuperscript{222} Id.
\textsuperscript{223} Id.
\textsuperscript{224} Id.
\textsuperscript{225} Id.
\textsuperscript{226} Id.
\textsuperscript{227} Id.
\textsuperscript{228} Id.


\textsuperscript{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.\footnote{Harden, supra note 229.} Suppose a disadvantaged student is selected for admission despite standardized testing no longer being a requirement.\footnote{Ake-Little, supra note 95.} Unfortunately, this student’s socioeconomic barriers will not disappear after admission.\footnote{Id.} These students must rely on financial aid more than their privileged peers.\footnote{Id.} Without standardized testing, it is likely that underprivileged students will be at a disadvantage when being considered to receive scholarships.\footnote{Id.}

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities across the United States are no longer requiring standardized test scores for admission.\footnote{Churchill, supra note 55.} Before this, scores on the SAT and ACT were the primary factors in determining which prospective students would receive merit-based financial aid.\footnote{Joanna Nesbit, How Will Students Get College Scholarships if They Can't Take the SAT?, \textit{MONEY} (Oct. 19, 2020) https://money.com/college-scholarships-sat-tests-canceled/.} Now, it appears that many universities are choosing to rely on a student’s academic performance for scholarship decisions.\footnote{Id.} Unfortunately, basing scholarship decisions on high school GPA will bar many underprivileged students from receiving aid they desperately need.\footnote{Alex Engler, \textit{Enrollment Algorithms Are Contributing to the Crises of Higher Education}, \textit{Brookings} (Sept. 14, 2021) https://www.brookings.edu/articles/enrollment-algorithms-are-contributing-to-the-crises-of-higher-education/.}

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.\footnote{Will Patch, \textit{Serving Low Income Students: Insights from the 2019 Niche College Applicant Survey of Student Confidence and Concerns}, \textit{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/.} Moreover, these disadvantaged students were nine times as likely to have a GPA under 2.5.\footnote{Id.} As previously discussed, higher income students often have a
great advantage over their less affluent peers in terms of their K-12 education. Schools with a wealthier student population have better teachers, offer more advanced courses and extracurricular activities, and have more resources overall. Now, it appears that more affluent students have grade inflation as another advantage based on the high school they attended.

A new study has shown that schools with a wealthier student population had a significant median GPA increase from 2005 to 2016. Seth Gershensen, an associate professor at American University who conducted the research, explained, “In other words, it’s gotten easier to get a good grade in more affluent schools, but not in less affluent ones.” While researchers have been comparing GPA to test scores for several years, these studies have been limited to small pools of students. 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. During the course of the study, more affluent schools and less affluent schools experienced very different trends. For instance, in 2010, the probability of receiving an A in a wealthier school increased significantly. Meanwhile, in 2013, the probability of receiving an A in a poorer school decreased significantly. Moreover, Gershensen’s analysis on ACT scores and data also shows grade inflation accelerating from 2011 forward, primarily in schools with advantaged students.

Unfortunately, for lower income students, there is often a gap between cost of attendance and available financial aid. 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. The study looked at the cost of attending over five-hundred public universities and factored in the average Pell Grant a student

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243 Id.
244 Id.
245 Id.
246 Id.
247 Id.
248 Id.
249 Id.
250 Id.
251 Id.
252 Id.
254 Id.
received, as well as the average financial loans taken. These students are being priced out of attending college, but scholarships and merit-based aid can help to fill that gap. Unfortunately, without a standardized testing requirement, high school GPA becomes the primary consideration for scholarships. As a result, disadvantaged students will have a much harder time filling the gap between cost of attendance and financial aid.

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. While there is correlation, there does not appear to be causation. In other words, it is not standardized tests that are causing these disparities. Instead, standardized tests are merely reflecting the inequities of an unfair society. The SAT in particular was designed to measure a student’s ability to write clear sentences, understand complex passages, and solve math problems. While an inequality in academic skills amongst these particular groups is apparent, the test is not creating these inequalities but is revealing them.

The issue thus is not a biased test but one of equal opportunity amongst prospective students. While critics of standardized testing point to more affluent students’ access to test preparation, they miss the larger issue at hand. These more affluent students are the “beneficiaries of lifelong inequalities” in opportunity and education. The inequalities start much earlier than college admissions, and arguably go back to circumstances of birth. 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.
260 Harden, supra note 229.
261 Id.
262 Id.
263 Id.
264 Id.
265 Id.
266 Id.
267 Id.
standardized tests. Poverty and racism can play an extremely harmful role in a child’s learning, even to the extent of harming their brain development.

Consequently, eliminating standardized tests will not create an equal opportunity for all prospective college students. 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. 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. Without standardized tests, these issues will become much harder to recognize and solve.

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.