

January 2021 PSAT/SAT/ACT Decision

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: How was this decision made to not offer the PSAT?

Answer: The district looked closely at all the metrics available at the time of the decision. The following were factors in making this decision:

- As recommended by Public Health of Madison-Dane County, these metrics include the number of new cases of COVID-19 in Dane County. We want to see the 14-day average of new cases to be 43 or fewer per day before returning to in-person instruction for grades 6-12. Through January 4th, the 14-day average was 168 per day.
- Dane County had a high positivity rate of 5.8% (Public Health's benchmark is 5% or below)
 - Dane County has a large number of cases (32%) over the most recent 14 day period who don't know where they could have gotten COVID-19 (Public Health's benchmark is 20%)
 - Dane County Public Health is only able to contact 45% of positive cases within 48 hours. (Public Health's benchmark is 85%)

Also, a group representing high school guidance staff, assistant principals, central office staff, building services and nursing services staff met to determine what can be done as well as the pros and cons of any decision. This group recommended that the PSAT not be given in support of the safety of students and staff.

National tests scores have been waived for admission by the majority of colleges and universities in the United States. As the tests are currently optional, this also factored into the decision.

Question: What are options for students to apply for the National Merit Scholarship? Is that still an option?

Answer: In conversations with the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, there is a way to seek qualification without taking the PSAT. This process is summarized below:

- 1) Go to the NMS website (<https://www.nationalmerit.org/>). Click on the "Resources" tab on the right. You will find a link to Alternate Entry information. The document outlines exactly what students need to do in order to be considered for a National Merit Scholarship. Please pay close attention to timelines!
- 2) One requirement is to take the SAT anytime between August 2020 and June, 2021. You can register for the SAT through the College Board website:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register>

On this site students will find locations where the test will be given. Students may take the SAT at any location that is giving the test. All fees will be paid by the student.

Question: What about taking the ACT? Has that changed?

Answer: There is a difference between the ACT that is given on Saturdays (National tests) and the ACT given during school hours in the late winter (State-mandated test). While the actual test is not different, the ability of the district to provide students with the test is different.

National test dates: These dates require student registration and payment; the district provides the space to take the test. These are optional tests. These can be registered for on the ACT website: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration.html>

Currently, the national ACT test is not being given in MMSD due to the pandemic. When MMSD schools reopen, these tests will likely resume as soon as possible. If students wish to take the ACT prior to reopening, part of the ACT registration process involves indicating the location where students will test.

State Mandated test dates: The State of Wisconsin requires all high school juniors to take the ACT+Writing exam. As of this date, this requirement has not been changed; it would require an act of the state legislature to do this.

The district is continuing to plan as if the state-mandated ACT will be given. This means that plans are being worked on for testing on one of the dates offered by the state: March 9, March 23 or April 13. Please note: the ACT **cannot** be given virtually, it must in person. Given the current decision to continue providing virtual instruction, at least the March 9th date will not be possible. If the district returns to in-person instruction prior to any of these dates, everything will be ready for giving the ACT.

If the district is still using a virtual instruction model on the April 13 test date, other options for providing all juniors the ACT are being considered. This includes a fall test date, at no cost to students.

Question: Where can I go to get more information?

Answer: Your student's high school guidance counselor is likely the best place to go for specific information. Additional questions can be sent to Tim Peterson, Director of Assessment, at: tpeterson2@madison.k12.wi.us