



The new SAT: Rigor gets a pass

By The Tribune-Review

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Newly announced changes to the SAT move the college-entrance exam in the wrong direction — dumbing it down when, if anything, it should be more rigorous.

The essay portion, added as a mandatory feature in 2005, becomes optional. But who needs to demonstrate cogent communication skills anyway? The quarter-point penalty for wrong answers is eliminated. So, guess away, kids — you might get lucky! After all, everybody's a winner! And the vocabulary section replaces such words as “prevaricator” and “ignominious” with the likes of “synthesis” and “empirical” — “and probably ‘proletariat,’” The Daily Caller's Eric Owens wryly observes.

These are symptoms of a greater malady: the dumbing down of education in general. It's no coincidence that David Coleman, president of the nonprofit College Board that runs the SAT, was among the leading architects of the abysmal Common Core standards. Cato Institute scholar Neal McCluskey tells The Wall Street Journal that Common Core and the revised SAT both suffer from “lots of rhetoric with lofty goals” and lack “clear evidence” that they will achieve those goals or push students to meet them.

The lofty rhetoric obscures self-interest, too. Aiming to recoup market share lost to the rival ACT, the SAT is becoming more like the ACT.

Instead of motivating students to excel by stiffening the challenge it presents, the SAT is telling them that time-honored measures of intellectual acumen no longer matter. And that's the wrong message to send.