

# THE NEW PSAT:

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### 1. When does the new PSAT go into effect?

October 2015.

### 2. Can I take the old PSAT?

No. Unfortunately, the old PSAT is no longer administered.

### 3. Will the new PSAT still qualify me for National Merit?

Yes, just like the old PSAT, the redesigned PSAT is the first step in the National Merit Competition. A student is eligible as long as the student meets all of the following criteria:

- a) A full-time high school student
- b) Has attended four years of high school grades 9-12
- c) Either is a US Citizen or applying for US Citizenship
- d) In the 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- e) Planning to apply to college in 2016

### 4. I have heard of the PSAT 8/9 and PSAT 10. What are those and how are they different from the regular PSAT?

To include more students in the PSAT experience, the College Board has created versions of the redesigned PSAT for different grade levels. While all exams use the same scoring scale, only the regular PSAT qualifies a student for National Merit.

The PSAT 8/9 is given to 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the spring or fall. The PSAT 10 is given to 10<sup>th</sup> graders in the spring. The regular PSAT is given to 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders only in the fall.

These exams use the same scoring scale. That means an 8<sup>th</sup> grader who took the PSAT 8/9 and got a 450 in Math would score a 450 in Math on the regular PSAT if she took it the same day. So a student should get better scores on these exams as he or she gets older.

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### **5. If I do well on the redesigned PSAT, should I take the redesigned SAT instead of the ACT?**

The redesigned PSAT is actually moving more closely in line with the material and format of the ACT. Therefore, a student who does well on the redesigned PSAT should not immediately assume the SAT is a better choice. It may indicate that the redesigned SAT would be a viable option but not the only option.

It is still best to also take an ACT diagnostic exam to see how you really do on the ACT and compare it to your PSAT score. If you score very poorly on the ACT diagnostic, especially in Science, taking the redesigned SAT may be worthwhile because the new SAT will not contain Science.

### **6. If I know I don't want to try the redesigned SAT, why not take the PLAN and get ready for the ACT instead?**

The PLAN is the practice version of the ACT, much like the PSAT is the practice version of the SAT. While the PLAN is more aligned with the ACT, the PSAT is the only test that qualifies you for the National Merit Scholarship. Moreover, many schools don't offer the PLAN to students. In fact, a few states and school districts actually require the PSAT so they don't bother to also administer the PLAN. Make sure to check with your school. One other big difference is that the PLAN is offered only to sophomores, while the PSAT is offered to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors.

No matter what, with the new changes to the redesigned PSAT, the new test will actually resemble the ACT more, so there's no need to worry if your school doesn't offer the PLAN.

### **7. How much math do I need to know?**

The College Board will be downgrading the amount of Geometry necessary for the test (not by much), while raising the number of problems that test Data Analysis (averages, graphs, etc.) and Algebra (systems of equations, functions, factoring, quadratics, etc.). Even a bit of Trig shows up. This means the math will be harder than on the old PSAT.

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### 8. Why is no calculator allowed and is that going to hurt me?

The College Board states that the no-calculator section makes it easier to assess a student's expertise in math and ability to interpret and apply multiple math concepts. While it seems that this might slow a student down, it doesn't necessarily mean that the numbers are going to be harder to calculate. A student will need the same basic knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, order of operations, and factoring.

Students weak or slow in these basic root topics should consider tutoring or review. For high scorers, the no-calculator math section won't have much of an impact as long as they can avoid careless calculation errors. In addition, there is no guessing penalty, so students should not become overly anxious about possible mistakes without a calculator.

### 9. Should I prepare for the PSAT?

Everyone who plans to take the PSAT should do some preparation, but the amount of preparation will vary dramatically. For more details, see "How to Prepare for the New PSAT."

### 10. Is there enough released material to prepare well for the PSAT?

The College Board in conjunction with Khan Academy will release more materials shortly. However, sample problems for both the SAT and PSAT have been released on the College Board website with answers and explanations.

### 11. How do I register for the PSAT?

The PSAT is administered by your high school. Your school counselor will help you and the rest of your class sign up in the fall to take the exam. Students are not allowed to sign up independently of their schools.