

## State and region's SAT scores still lag behind nation

The new version of the Scholastic Aptitude Test features three parts – critical reading (also known as verbal), math and a new writing section. Each test has a maximum score of 800 points and a minimum of 200. This paper, like most other reviews of the “New SAT,” will focus on scoring on the traditional verbal and math sections and doesn’t include the written essay section in analysis. Thus, this report will measure SAT scores in a range of 400 to 1600, a perfect composite score on the verbal and math sections. Student scores in this report are the most-recent test results of high school seniors in the class of 2006, regardless of the year they took the test. State averages in this report generally include both public and private schools combined together unless otherwise noted.

In 2006, South Carolina’s combined public and private school average SAT score of 985 was the lowest of the 22 “SAT states” -- states that use the exam as their primary college admission test. All the other 28 states in the U.S. that don’t use the SAT as the main college admission test also scored higher than South Carolina. The lone geographic region that the state did outscore was Washington, D.C. The District of Columbia had a composite score of 959.

South Carolina’s 985 score was an eight-point drop from 2005, when its average was 993. The national average composite score for 2006 was 1021, reflecting a seven-point decline from 2005. Many educators attributed the decline across the nation this year to the addition of the writing portion, which added to the test’s length, and changes in the types of questions in the math and verbal sections. State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum, among others, said, given the change in format and duration, observers should view this year’s combination of three scores as a “baseline year.”

However, the College Board, which administers the SAT, said research shows fatigue was not a factor on student performance. According to the board, the most significant factor in the overall national decline was a decrease in retesting. Typically, students who take the test a second time see a 30-point increase on their combined math-verbal score. Ten percent fewer high school seniors across the U.S. took the test a second time this year compared to 2005. Percent figures on retesting were not available for individual states, the College Board said.

The table below gives a breakdown of South Carolina’s average scores by sex and race.

	Test	2005 S.C. Score	2006 S.C. Score	Difference 2005 - 2006	2006 S.C. Composite	National Composite
<b>S. Carolina Average</b>	Verbal	494	487	-7	985	1021
	Math	499	498	-1		
<b>Male Average</b>	Verbal	499	489	-10	1004	1041
	Math	517	515	-2		
<b>Female Average</b>	Verbal	490	486	-4	971	1004
	Math	485	485	0		
<b>African-American</b>	Verbal	425	421	-4	849	863
	Math	430	428	-2		
<b>White Average</b>	Verbal	519	512	-7	1034	1063
	Math	523	522	-1		

Source: S.C. Department of Education

### **COMPARING SCORES BY INCOME LEVELS**

Children from both the state’s wealthiest and poorest families compared unfavorably to their peers nationally on the 2006 SAT. High school seniors from S.C. families earning more than \$100,000 a year achieved an average score of 1069, which was 44 points below their peers nationwide (1113). Those South Carolina families with income below \$10,000 were 47 points below their peers across the U.S. (886 to 839).

With regard to middle-income families, the state's scores do approach the national average. Members of the class of 2006 in S.C. who came from families earning between \$40,000 and \$50,000 netted a 974 on the SAT – 20 points below their peers in the nation (994).

**STATE RANKS NEAR TOP IN GAINS OVER DECADE**

Despite South Carolina's lower SAT composite score, the state remains one of the nation's best in improved SAT scores during the last decade. South Carolina's average score has improved by 31 points since 1996, which is only surpassed by one other SAT state, North Carolina (32 points). Four other "Non-SAT states" have also seen gains larger than 31 points in the last 10 years, but their student participation rates on the test range from 4 percent to 26 percent. Since 1996, the national average has risen by just 8 points.

**WHAT ABOUT THE LIFE SCHOLARSHIP?**

A review of scores by sex and race also reveals the ability of members of these groups to qualify for the LIFE Scholarship instituted by the South Carolina Education Lottery. One of the key components for qualifying for a LIFE Scholarship is a minimum 1100 composite SAT score for a freshman entering a four-year college or university. The 1100 score is no longer an absolute requirement to obtain the scholarship as it was previously, but yet it still plays a part. The LIFE Scholarship program dictates freshmen entering a four-year institution in the state **must meet two of the following three criteria**: 1) minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA, 2) 1100 SAT score (or 24 on ACT), 3) rank in top 30 percent of their high school graduating class.

In the mainly rural Santee-Lynches Region that features a large percentage of minority students, scholarship assistance is essential for many youth to attend post-secondary education. The table below identifies public and private high school seniors by sex and race meeting the SAT score requirement for the LIFE Scholarship in 2006.

**High school seniors in state scoring at least 1100 on SAT to qualify for LIFE scholarship**

	All Students	Females	Males	African-Amer.	Whites
<b>Students Tested</b>	<b>23,556</b>	<b>13,212</b>	<b>10,344</b>	<b>5,496</b>	<b>15,169</b>
<b>Students Meeting Requirement</b>	<b>6,739</b>	<b>3,297</b>	<b>3,442</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>5,490</b>
<b>Percent Meeting Requirement</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>36.2%</b>

Source: The College Board

Statewide, less than three of every 10 students taking the SAT in 2006 met the 1100 level as a qualification for the LIFE Scholarship. Looking at the scores by race shows more alarming disparities – 36.2 percent of white students met the 1100 requirement, but only 6.5 percent of African Americans hit the mark. In relative terms, a little more than one in every three white test-takers met the SAT qualification for the LIFE, while only about one in every 15 African Americans did so.

**CLEMSON, USC ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS**

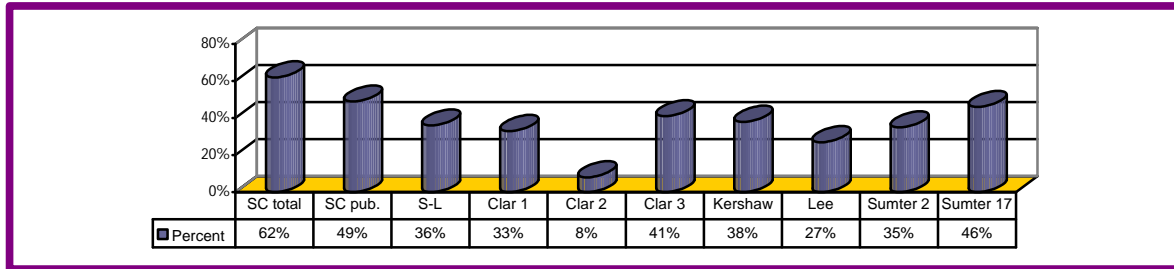
Any review of the state's SAT scores should include average incoming freshmen scores at Clemson University and the University of South Carolina, Columbia – the state's two flagship universities. Both schools are highly regarded for their academic programs on the national level, and their average SAT scores are obviously well above the state average. A report in *The State* newspaper listed USC's incoming freshmen average SAT score for the fall of 2006 at 1171. Clemson's average for freshmen was 1216. The Princeton Review, a national leader in educational services, didn't vary much in listing USC's average incoming freshmen score at 1151 and Clemson's at 1204.

These average scores are a guide for prospective students, but they don't represent cut-offs for the two universities. Schools consider many other factors in the admission process, including grade point average, extracurricular activities and a varied course load. However, it's also important to emphasize that highly regarded universities, such as Clemson and USC, have become increasingly competitive over time in admissions as more students apply. Clemson, USC and the College of Charleston all reported a record number of freshman applications for Fall 2006. *The State* newspaper reported that USC's average SAT for incoming freshmen increased 41 points during a five-year period, ranging from 1130 in 2002 to 1171 in 2006.

**HOW STUDENTS FARED IN REGION**

There are seven public school districts in the Santee-Lynches Region with 10 high schools. Five of the seven districts have a single high school. Only Kershaw County School District and Sumter School District 2 have two or more high schools. Of the 2,034 seniors in the seven public school districts in 2006, a total of 728, or 36 percent, took the SAT, representing a three percent climb from 2004. That year, 684 seniors took the SAT. The current total is still considerably lower than the state's average participation rate for public schools, which was 49 percent this year.

**Percent of region's 2006 public high school seniors taking SAT**

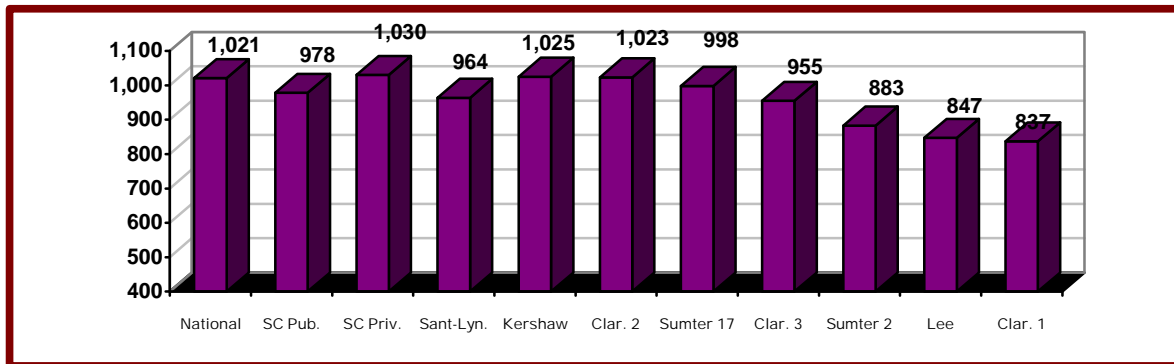


Source: S.C. Department of Education

In Clarendon District 2 only 15 of 177 seniors in 2006 (8 percent) took the SAT. The Lee County School District only had 27 percent of seniors take the test, but this represented a 10 percent increase from 2004. Sumter District 17 had the highest percentage of SAT test-takers in the region at 46 percent.

The national average SAT score is considered a baseline that states and school districts are compared against. The chart below shows how the state and region's school districts stack up.

**National, state and district composite SAT scores for 2006**



Source: S.C. Department of Education

Four of the seven regional districts improved their SAT scores from 2005. Clarendon 2 led the way with a 41 point gain, but it had just 15 seniors take the test. Sumter 17, with 223 SAT test-takers, saw a 20 point increase; Lee showed a 19 point climb and Clarendon 1 saw its scores rise by seven points. The three other districts had lower scores in 2006 than 2005. It should be noted that although Kershaw had a five point decrease from 1030 to 1025, the district's scores still ranked seventh-best among the state's 85 districts.

Similar to the one-year comparison, during the last five years the region's SAT scores have shown mixed results with some improving and others not. The region's average score has risen one point from 963 in 2001 to 964 in 2006. The participation rate over the five-year period has decreased two percent from 38 to 36 percent. The smallest districts -- with 15 to 35 seniors annually taking the SAT -- have shown big increases, led by Clarendon 2 with a 90 point spike since 2001 and Lee with a 64 point increase. Kershaw has seen a slight 4-point improvement; while the Sumter districts have shown a decline. Since 2001, the state has had an 11 point increase and the national average has risen two points.

**Scores in 2006 compared to 2001**

	Nat Avg.	S.C. Avg.	Santee-Lyn. Avg	Clar. 1 Avg.	Clar. 2 Avg.	Clar. 3 Avg.	Kershaw Avg.	Lee Avg.	Sumt. 2 Avg.	Sumt. 17 Avg.
2001 Score	1020	974	963	836	933	929	1021	783	919	1014
2006 Score	1021	985	964	837	1023	955	1025	847	883	998
Difference	+1	+11	+1	+1	+90	+26	+4	+64	-36	-16

Source: S.C. Department of Education

As the chart above shows, the state has been slowly closing the gap with the nation's SAT average in the last five years but still trails the U.S. by 36 points. Regionally, just two districts surpass the national average this year -- Kershaw County with a 1025 and Clarendon 2 at 1023. Four districts, Clarendon 1 and 3, Lee and Sumter 2, still lag considerably behind the U.S. The chart below provides a breakdown of all the public high schools' SAT scores in the Santee-Lynches Region.

**Summary of public high schools' SAT scores (2005 & 2006)**

High School	Seniors Tested	Total Seniors	2005 Verbal	2006 Verbal	2005 Math	2006 Math	2005 Composite	2006 Composite
Scott's Branch	20	61	411	419	419	418	830	837
Manning	15	177	481	506	501	517	982	1023
East Clarendon	29	71	481	468	483	487	964	955
North Central	13	82	532	528	534	548	1066	1076
Camden High	81	235	526	514	522	530	1048	1044
Lugoff-Elgin	122	250	500	500	511	508	1011	1008
Lee Central	35	128	425	419	403	428	828	847
Crestwood	102	279	448	469	439	453	887	922
Lakewood	88	267	442	426	451	414	893	840
Sumter	223	484	497	502	481	496	978	998

Source: S.C. Department of Education

All three Kershaw County high schools had SAT scores that exceeded the state average. In addition, two of the three Kershaw schools had SAT averages that were higher than the national average. Manning High School, with 15 SAT test-takers, exceeded the state and national average as well.

Sumter High surpassed the state average for the first time since 2003. The five remaining high schools ranged between 30 points (East Clarendon High) and 148 points (Scott's Branch High) below the state average of 985.

**S.C. SURPASSES 1 STATE WHEN NEW WRITING SECTION SCORES CONSIDERED**

When the new writing section is factored into scoring analysis, South Carolina does surpass one state, Hawaii, in SAT scoring in addition to the District of Columbia. On the essay portion, South Carolina was tied with Florida for second worst with a 480 score; Hawaii had a 472. When all three sections are then factored, S.C.'s composite score is 1465 and ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. ahead of Hawaii's 1463. Washington D.C.'s composite score was 1,441.

**SUMMARY**

Overall, the region had mixed results on the SAT in 2006, averaging a 964 score and a participation rate of 36 percent. As the national economy becomes more dependent on a highly skilled work force, advanced education will play a larger role in the economic development of both individuals and communities.

In the largely rural Santee-Lynches Region, which has a high percentage of minority youth, the need to increase post-secondary educational opportunities for high school students is essential for competitiveness. Local educators, in consort with business and government leaders, must use all available means to ensure high school seniors are more competitive in SAT scores and test-participation rates. In doing so, more seniors will qualify for the LIFE Scholarship and other academic funding opportunities. Unless a much larger percentage of our high school graduates have the academic foundation and financial resources for advanced education, the Santee-Lynches Region's ability to compete economically with other areas both in and out of the state will be seriously degraded.