

# THE Center for Education Reform



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## Back-to-School Alert 2<sup>nd</sup> in a series from CER

### THE DEMISE OF THE SATs AND...STRIKING TEACHERS

(9/3/99) Once upon a time the SAT was a solid barometer of student aptitude for higher education. Now the test makers' tinkering has called into serious question the effectiveness of the SAT. 1999 scores are once again disappointing at 505 and 511 for verbal and math tests respectively. The gap between whites and minorities has grown again, a testament to the fact that schools continue to ill serve our nation's less advantaged children.

The SAT's woes are not new. Since the early 1990s the Center for Education Reform has been following the trends in the SAT. Just this week, *Newsweek* magazine reports on a new book by Nicholas Lehman about the SAT, in which he notes:

"...Its original name, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, was changed in 1994 to the Scholastic Assessment Test, but now its purveyors prefer simply to use the initials, to avoid discussion of exactly what the test is meant to measure. The story of the test's creation and its rise to totemic importance has never been told – until now. What will be perhaps most surprising about it is how different the social function the test was supposed to perform is from the one it does perform now: a device meant to eliminate an American class system has instead helped create a new one."

Some of the recent changes to and the results of the SAT are symptoms of a larger problem:

- Since 1987, the proportion of SAT takers with "A" grades climbed from 28% to a record 39% in 1999, even though scores have risen only ten points, pointing to rampant grade inflation.
- The largest decline in SAT scores in the last two decades prior to 1996 were among white students. Only 30% percent of the decline of the '70s was due to demographic changes.
- Minority test takers have increased to an all time high and their scores have risen gradually, but the gap this year is still large, despite the test having been made easier in previous years.
- Recentering in 1995 makes scores appear higher than when most of the adults writing the news took the SAT. The same scores in the 80s were in the high 400 range out of a possible 1600. Recentering adjusted the scores so that the average score was changed artificially to 500.
- Just last month, the SAT's parent company announced it has been purging any questions that contained bias, making it apparent that the SAT has lost much of its rigor and purpose.

CER has pulled together background and historical information on the SAT for your perusal and its available at our special *Back to School* button at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).



**Teachers Strike Out:** So what does a union do in a city where half of the children don't graduate from high school and there's clearly a widening racial gap in achievement? In Detroit, they strike. Citing disagreements over time and demands for higher wages and smaller classes, union representatives left 172,000 children stranded. Detroit's teachers are torn, but the current union boss says "this is a group that wanted to strike regardless of the consequences."