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## STUDENTS, COMMUNITY GROUPS SUE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA TO DROP SAT, ACT

*Suit alleges the university discriminates against low-income students and others by relying on standardized-test scores in admissions*

By Melissa Korn  
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A group of students and community organizations filed a much-anticipated lawsuit against the University of California, alleging that the university system discriminates against low-income students, racial minorities and others by requiring SAT or ACT admissions tests.

The suit was filed Tuesday in California state court on behalf of a high-school sophomore, two seniors, and a first-year student at Pasadena City College, all of whom it says would be strong candidates for more selective UC campuses except for their test scores. Several California college-prep and social-justice nonprofits are also plaintiffs in the suit. The Compton Unified School District is preparing to file a related suit.

They seek to bar the UC system from requiring applicants to submit SAT or ACT scores, and from using scores in admission decisions unless it can demonstrate a way of assessing the scores "in a rigorous and meaningful, transparent, nondiscriminatory, and non-stigmatizing manner," according to the suit.

The plaintiffs are wading into a nationwide debate about meritocracy and fairness in college admissions. Concerns that certain groups get special advantages, because of wealth, race or other factors have come to a head with last year's trial regarding admissions practices at Harvard University, as well as the more recent admissions cheating scandal that accuses families of having their teens lie about their academic credentials and cheat on the SAT and ACT.

More than 1,000 colleges and universities including the University of Chicago and Colorado College now make test scores optional. They have questioned whether standardized tests offer any more value than high-school performance in predicting college success. Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Loyola University Maryland say applicants who don't submit scores are more diverse than those who do, and perform at the same level once in college.

Defenders of the tests say students with high scores tend to fare well in college and beyond. The standardized tests have been considered by many as an equalizer, allowing colleges to identify talent from high schools with which they are not familiar.

A UC task force is currently assessing the value of the SAT and ACT in admissions, with recommendations expected before the end of the school year, and the university will make a decision after that, said a spokeswoman from the UC president's office. Its determination is expected to have wide-ranging implications due to its size and clout, as UC campuses received more than 176,000 freshman applications last year.

"These discriminatory tests irreparably taint UC's ostensibly 'holistic' admissions process," the lawsuit says, adding that the tests "act as a proxy for wealth and race and thus concentrate privilege on UC campuses."

UC campuses can consider academic performance, standardized test scores, class rank, extracurricular activities and other factors, but unlike many other selective institutions are barred from taking into account race or ethnicity in admissions.

"We are disappointed that plaintiffs have filed a lawsuit when the University of California has already devoted substantial resources to studying this complex issue," the university spokeswoman said Tuesday.

According to College Board data from this year, 45 percent of white students who took the SAT in California scored at least a 1200 out of a possible 1600, and 55 percent of Asian students did, compared with only 9 percent of African-American students and 12 percent of Hispanic students.

The College Board, which owns the SAT, has grappled with how to better take into account a student's background and how that may play into his or her performance on the test. The nonprofit group said in August it would share with colleges a range of data points about students' environment, such as median family income and crime, reversing a plan to issue a single "adversity score" combining all those metrics.

"The notion that the SAT is discriminatory is false," said a spokesman for the College Board. "Any objective measure of student achievement will shine a light on inequalities in our education system. Our focus, with our members and partners, is combating these longstanding inequalities."