



## College 101: The Scary Stuff Part #1 - Money



Based on the media hype, the fear of not getting accepted to a college of the student's choice qualifies as the scariest part of the college admission process. The reality? Unless you limit your list to a single school or only the most highly selective institutions, the chances of this happening are quite slim. For most students and families, the *actual* scary part is paying for the college of your choice...



The remedy to this fear? **Knowledge.**

### Paying FOR College

How Minnesota families make it happen

Click [here](#) for a Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) overview detailing how families finance a college education. Click [here](#) to listen to a Minnesota Public Radio broadcast segment on the subject. **Wondering if the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is worth the headache?** Click [here](#) for a podcast that may help higher income families answer that question. The Minnesota Office of Higher Education [website](#) provides another great resource. (Note: the FAFSA becomes available October 1<sup>st</sup>. Click [here](#) to learn more.)

The FAFSA application is the foundation of every financial aid package. It relies on two basic financial inputs. The first is historical: how much income the student and family reported in the prior, prior year (i.e.. 2021 Income Tax Returns for a 2023 FAFSA). The second reflects the value of non-home/non-retirement assets the student and parent control at the time the FAFSA is filed. For students and families that submit their federal tax returns, the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) link allows the FAFSA to quickly populate the income portions of the form simplifying that step of the process. Click [here](#) to learn more. (Note: To make income tax filing easier, the IRS provides a Free File website. Click [here](#) after January 1, 2022 to learn more.) Students with paid work do not necessarily need to complete tax returns but taking this step can be an advantage when it comes to financial aid. Click [here](#) for some general tips related to income tax filing for teens. Bottom line for teens? If state and/or federal taxes came out of your wages this year, filling taxes is the way you get that money back! Your year-end W2 has this information. Watch for it!

The good news? **Filing 2021 taxes allows families to more easily take advantage of financial aid estimators** -- [FAFSA4caster](#), school specific options (Google "school name" "net price calculator") and/or aggregators such as [MyinTuition](#) -- earlier in the process. **Knowledge is key to affordability!**

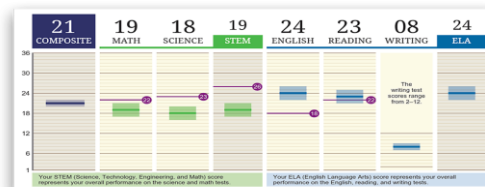
### Important information for college applications:

SPCPA School Code: 242 284

Counselor: Alison Green  
(greena@spcpa.org)

School Information:  
16 W 5<sup>th</sup> St  
St Paul, MN 55102  
(651) 290-2225

## College 101: The Scary Stuff Part #2 - Testing



For most juniors, taking a college entrance exam -- ACT and/or SAT (see page 2 for comparisons) -- is the first step in the college application process. Why?

- In the past, not taking the test limited college options as these scores were required for admission.
- *Since the pandemic, many colleges have taken a test optional approach letting the student decide whether to apply with test scores. **43% did for 2021.***
- Students who don't provide ACT/SAT scores place an additional burden on their high school transcript.
- *ACT/SAT scores can provide a helpful boost to the application particularly if the student chose the EC option in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.*
- **Taking the ACT at least once is a form of "college insurance."** You have it if you need/want it, but (if the test optional trend continues) don't have to share it if you don't want to.
- **SPCPA is offering the ACT on Tuesday March 8, 2022!**
- **Registration deadline is this Friday 12/10/21!!!**
- **Cost is \$59. Fee waivers are available for those who qualify. Questions? See Meg at the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor desk for more details.**



What's the Best Way to Study for the ACT?



SPCPA students have had success with a wide variety of ACT test preparation approaches. Independent study vs a classroom environment. Online preparation vs in person tutoring. There are a multitude of options. In general, it helps to think of the ACT as a 3 test option. Being mentally prepared to take the test more than once allows for the possibility that the student may refine their test taking approach over several months in hopes of achieving their best possible score rather than facing the pressure of a one-and-done event.

Ultimately, it all boils down to time, money and commitment. ACT test preparation decisions start from a few key questions:

- How important is the ACT score to the colleges and universities on a student's list? Is it required? Is the score range narrow or broad? Highly selective schools/programs tend to have narrow ranges at the upper end of the scale. What percent of their applicants are submitting scores even when it is test optional?
- What scores do the majority (middle 50%) of their admitted students receive? Click [here](#) for a helpful guide to college testing. Candidates whose scores fall below this target range may be accepted but lower ACT scores will put more pressure on other parts of the student's application (GPA, talent, interests, essays, etc).
- How likely is a student to achieve a "target" score without focused test preparation? A 2 point jump is a reasonable goal for students who invest significant time and energy to improve their scores. It is unreasonable to assume that simply taking the test repeatedly will result in meaningful changes in performance.
- What role do standardized test scores play in scholarship awards at the colleges and universities on the student's list? Spending time on the school's financial aid webpages can help families make the determination whether or not expensive tutoring in the short term may pay off in greater financial aid over the long term.

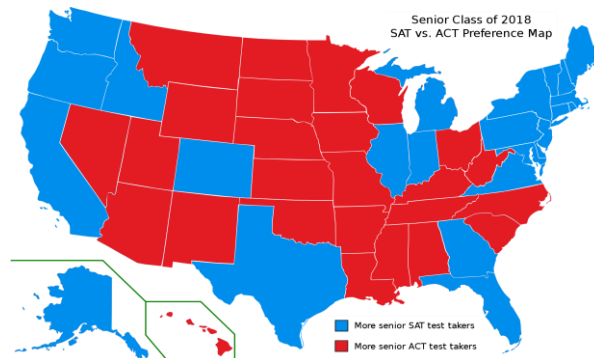
Like any other worthy goal in life, improving a standardized test score takes practice and a plan. It's not enough to "want" to do better or to set some arbitrary goal. To help with this process, over the coming months, this column will feature ACT test taking suggestions. Starting with the following free options...

- Click [here](#) for "Official" ACT study guide. (Note: the ACT organization also offers a variety of testing resources/materials/online tutoring for a fee via this [website](#).)
- Click [here](#) for practice tests by section. Varsity Tutors offers automatically scored, online tests by section (English, math, reading, science) making it easier to assess the success of your focused study efforts.
- Does reading *The Real ACT Prep Guide* leave you uninspired? Click [here](#) and [here](#) for tutor suggestions.
- Math not your strong suit. Click [here](#) for ACT math formulas and when to use them.

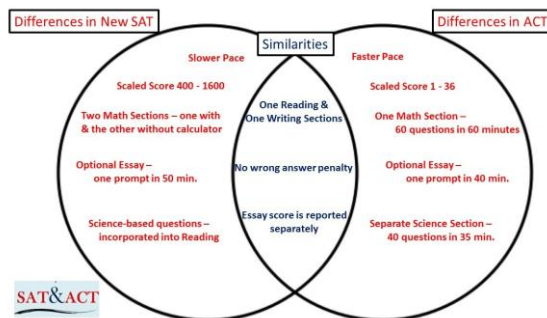


Testing 101:  
**ACT** vs. **SAT**  
Just the Facts...

- Worried about test taking anxiety? Click [here](#) for current test optional colleges and universities.
- No college or university prefers one test over the other.
- No college or university requires both tests.
- Like ACT tests, SAT tests are offered during [regular national test dates](#).
- Historically, the decision to take one test over the other tends to be geographical and/or based on school/state requirements:



- Since the SAT was redesigned in 2016, the similarities between the SAT and ACT have outweighed their differences with a few key exceptions (Note: the scoring systems remain very different but can be compared via [this link](#)):



- **To summarize, whichever test gives an individual student their personal best score is by default the best test for them.**
- Considering taking both the ACT and the SAT? Click [here](#) to learn more.