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SAT State of Affairs

The College Board has just released the scoring results for college bound seniors who graduated in 2006 and who took the SAT Reasoning test during their high school years at any time through April 2006. Nationally, scores dipped a bit from the results posted in 2005. Pennsylvania's reading score also fell a fairly sharp 8 points to 493.

Analysts of all stripes are trying to dissect the numbers to explain the sudden dip. Maybe it's real; maybe it's not. But that is not Pennsylvania's most telling problem. Pennsylvania's 2006 crop of test takers performed below the national average in math and reading as well as the new writing test.

What's worse, Pennsylvania SAT scores were lower than North Carolina's. In math the NC average score was 513 while the PA average was 500, a significant difference. Reading scores were 495 and 493 respectively, only marginally different. Interestingly, both African-American and white students scored better in NC than in PA. Whites in NC had a combined reading and math score of 1058. In PA the combined white score was 1021—a major gap in performance between the two states. For African-American students, the NC combined reading and math score was 857 while PA's African-American combined score was 809, a substantially worse performance.

Thus, in reality the NC test takers of each race scored far better than the Pennsylvania test takers. The reason the overall NC SAT score gaps over PA are as low as they are comes about because 21 percent of the test takers in NC were African American while only 8 percent of Pennsylvania test takers were African American. In short, it is the heavier weighting of lower scores in NC that keeps the overall gap with PA as close as it is.

Test takers who attend public schools did not score as well as those attending private or religiously affiliated schools. In fact the disparity is quite large. In Pennsylvania, those attending religiously affiliated schools scored 34 points better than those attending public schools while those attending private schools scored more than 103 points better. North Carolina's results very are similar. But comparing public school systems reveals that those who attend Pennsylvania's public schools scored an average of 989 while those who attend North Carolina's public schools had an average score of 1006—a difference of 17 points.

But here is the worst part. Pennsylvania spends far more on education than North Carolina to achieve less. PA teachers in 2003, the year the latest graduating class entered high school, were being paid an average of \$52,600. At the same time, NC teachers were receiving \$43,000. a difference of \$9,600 or 22.3 percent. Likewise, PA total spending per student of \$8,997 far outpaced NC's expenditure of \$6,562, a remarkable 37 percent difference. This reflects both higher teacher salaries in PA as well as a 50 percent greater per pupil expenditure on administration and other non-instruction costs.

Students taking the SAT are asked their intended area of study. Thirteen percent of Pennsylvania's students indicated that they intended to go into education, which was tied with business for second as the most intended major behind health and allied services (18 percent). The average score for these future teachers was 958—well below the state average. Meanwhile, 9 percent of North Carolina's test takers indicated they wanted to be teachers. They scored an average of 970—38 points below the state average. It is disappointing, to say the least, that those we will depend on to raise test scores are themselves scoring well below the average of students planning to attend college. Do we expect the college experience will somehow transform mediocre students into great teachers?

Bottom line, Pennsylvania spends more and gets less in return on education than North Carolina. And yet to hear Pennsylvania teachers and public school apologists tell it, the state's education system is first rate. Sorry, the truth is, it isn't even average.

Jake Haulk, Ph.D. President

Please join us for a conference on *Improving The Western Pennsylvania Economy* on Thursday September 28th. Panel discussions will address the problems of the state's pro-union laws, tax problems faced by Pennsylvania's business, and how business leaders can help advance important initiatives. Speakers will include Pat Toomey from the Club for Growth, national public sector union expert David Denholm, and Jim Roddey, the first elected Chief Executive of Allegheny County. The conference will be held at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association in Oakland from 8:30AM to 12:30PM. For more information please contact us at 412.440.0079.

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Allegheny Institute for Public Policy 305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234 Phone (412) 440-0079 * Fax (412) 440-0085 E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
