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# State Policy and the SAT

**Is mandatory, or optional (but free)  
testing better?**

*(answered from the perspective of a state's policy board)*

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# A brief introduction

>> What is the SAT/ACT?

>> What are the state policies regarding the SAT/ACT?

>> Key variables: Participation and Score

>> Case Studies

>> Recommendations

# Which states have mandatory testing?

*Darker areas represent higher participation rates!*



# With more participants, come lower scores

## → Self Selection Bias

When SAT/ACT aren't mandatory, those who take the test are generally confident and have studied for it.

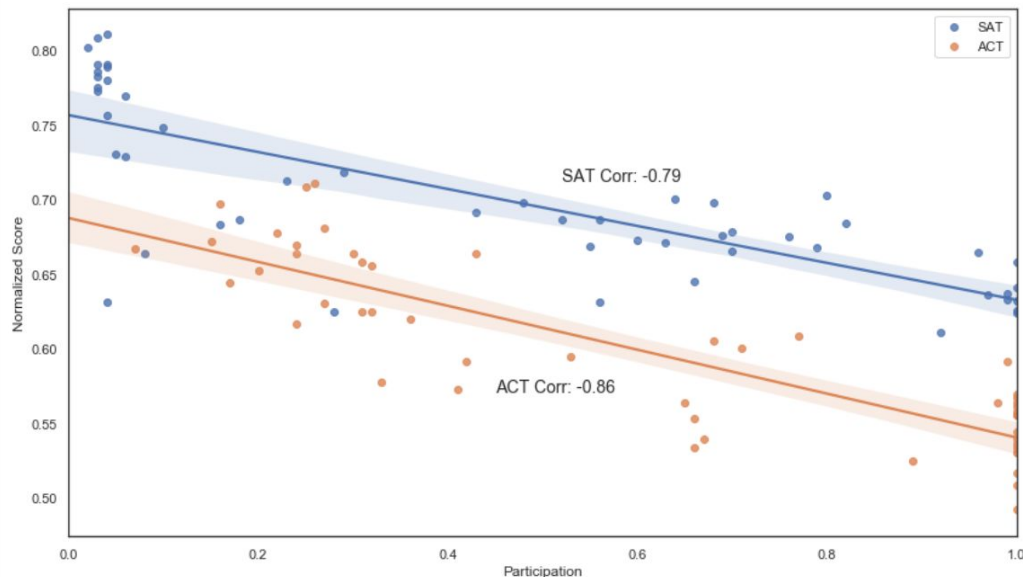
## → Free Testing

Levels the playing field, allowing for students from lower income groups to participate.

However, these populations tend to have lower scores on these tests.



## ACT and SAT Scores fall when participation Increases



# Two specific questions we want to answer

Do states with optional testing do better on average on tests?

How will optional testing affect participation rates?

## Case Study 1: SAT

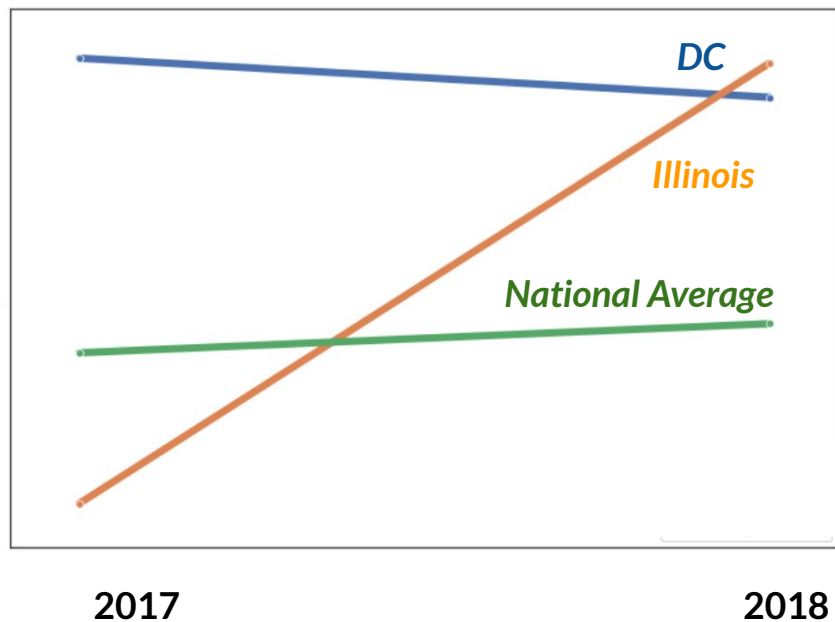
### >> District of Columbia

Mandatory in 2017, Optional but free in 2018

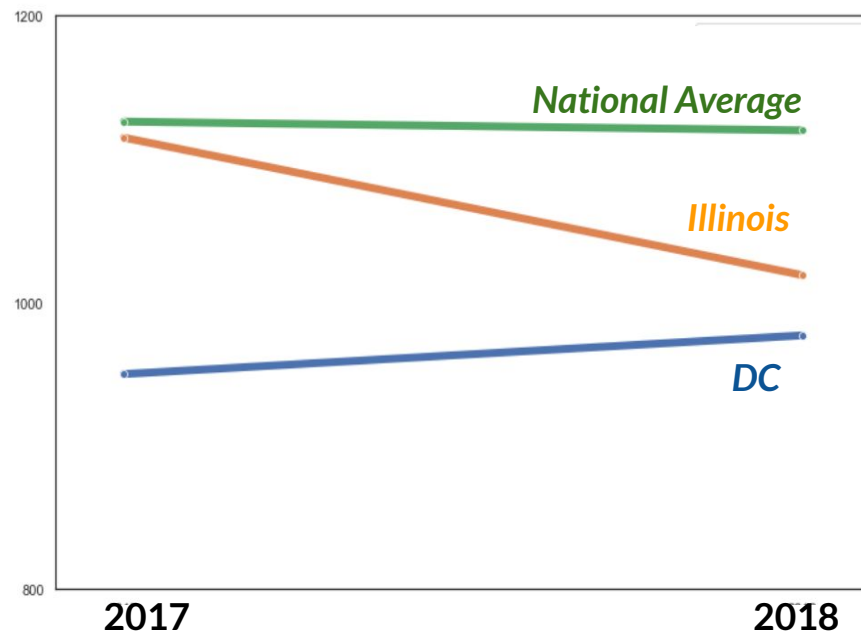
### >> Illinois

Optional in 2017, Mandatory in 2018

## Change in SAT Participation



## Change in SAT Composite Score



## Case Study 2: ACT

### >> Colorado

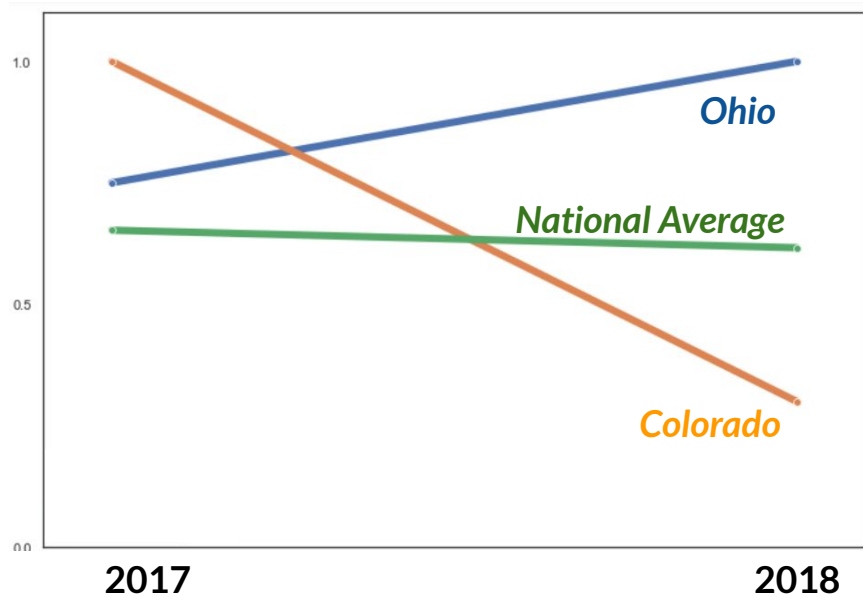
Mandatory in 2017, Optional but free in 2018  
(Switched from ACT to SAT)

### >> Ohio

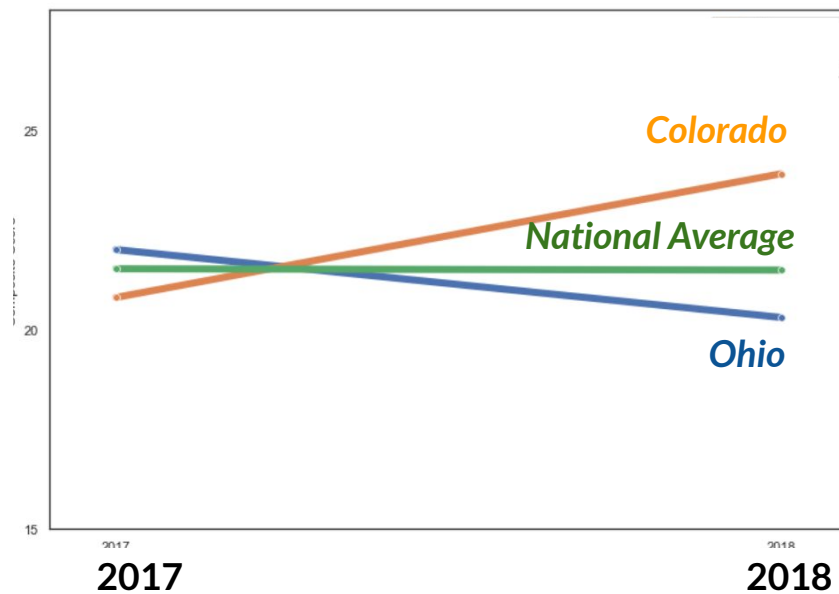
Optional in 2017, Mandatory in 2018  
(Law mandates all students must take ACT or SAT)



## Change in ACT Participation



## Change in ACT Composite Score



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# Conclusions

Moving from a mandatory test to an optional test will unsurprisingly:

1. Lower participation rates
2. Increase average scores

Further longitudinal data would be needed before making a clear recommendation, and cohort data on post-highschool education admission.