

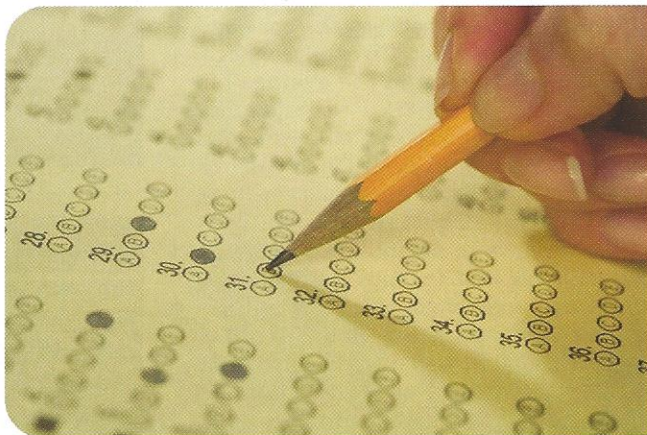
HIGHER STANDARDS

A primer for parents and college admission tests

BY ANNA RABHAN

Each year, over 1.5 million students take the SAT and more than 1 million take the ACT, as have students dating back to 1926 when the first SAT was administered. While Florida kids are no strangers to the concept of standardized tests—all parents of children in public school know the term “FCAT week”—the SAT and ACT are most students' only brush with a nationally distributed benchmark assessment.

College admission tests are widely and annually administered across United States. But that doesn't mean that they are widely understood.



The SAT and ACT today's teenagers will take is not the same test their parents, or even their older siblings, took. An obvious example is that most parents are old enough to remember analogies, a type of question used on the SAT until 2005. The dropping of the analogies section is just one of many ways that the test has evolved over the decades, not including changes in its scoring and administration.

Individual schools, both public and private, play a role in preparing students for college admission tests. Duval County Public Schools' Supervisor of Guidance, Nan Worsowicz, says that all 10th-graders take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) together; this year's test is set for October 12. Once the test has been scored, students receive individualized feedback regarding improvement strategies. Otherwise, Worsowicz says, test preparation is handled differently by each school. She recom-

mends that students use the College Board and ACT websites.

"We encourage even classroom teachers to use the 'Questions of the Day' [on the College Board website]. They're great because they're the exact format of what the kids are going to see on the test, so they can practice. And they'll give you hints and tips if you can't figure [the question] out," Worsowicz says. She also advises students to take advantage of test preparation programs, whether free or commercial, because "a lot of it is just being familiar with the test format: knowing how to answer, when to guess and when not to guess, knowing to read the questions first on the reading portion so you know what you're looking for. Participating in test prep really gives a kid an edge with those tips and strategies."

Parents and students who need help finding such programs can contact the student's counselor. Worsowicz also advises coming to the October 15 National Association of College Admissions Counseling's College Fair at the Prime Osborn Convention Center. The fair, coordinated by DCPS, will offer firsthand information and resources related to college admission testing from college and university representatives.

Parents can also help their children prepare for the test by exploring test score requirements for the colleges to which they want to apply. Melissa Blankenship, Assistant Director of Admissions at the University of North Florida, says that the influence SAT or ACT scores have on admission decisions depends on the school; but, she adds, "All of the 11 state universities in Florida do require students to take either the ACT or SAT. At UNF, since we do not require letters of recommendation, an essay, personal statement or résumé, we are primarily just looking at the student's recalculated grade point average and their ACT or SAT. So, in that sense, the tests are given a fairly heavy weight in that a student has to have a competitive enough test score even if they have a high GPA."

If students are unhappy with their test scores, they can always take the test again—and they should plan for at least one extra round of tests. "We usually suggest students, in their junior year, take each of the exams, see which one they do better on, and then start buying the study books and seeking out different test prep opportunities," says Blankenship.

DCPS' Worsowicz concludes, "Making kids aware of what colleges' minimum test score requirements are, taking the tests in time, talking to their counselors to find out about available resources like test fee waivers—just knowing about and taking advantage of what's available—would be a great thing."

Luck is, after all, no substitute for preparation. *

atics of all ages will go woo-hoo for the Beaches Museum & History Center's new
11 AM to 2 PM with hands-on train sets, balloons, cookies and a tour of a 28-ton steam
is \$2.50 for children, free for adults. While you're there, swing by the museum store to
rains range in size and price, and include models like the Polar Express, Freight Express
sareahistoricalociety.com. * BY JULIA JACOBO

JACKSONVILLE

OCTOBER 2011 • JACKSONVILLEMAG.COM

Northeast Florida's

BEST DENTISTS

Brush, Floss, Rinse, Smile :)

Wealth Managers

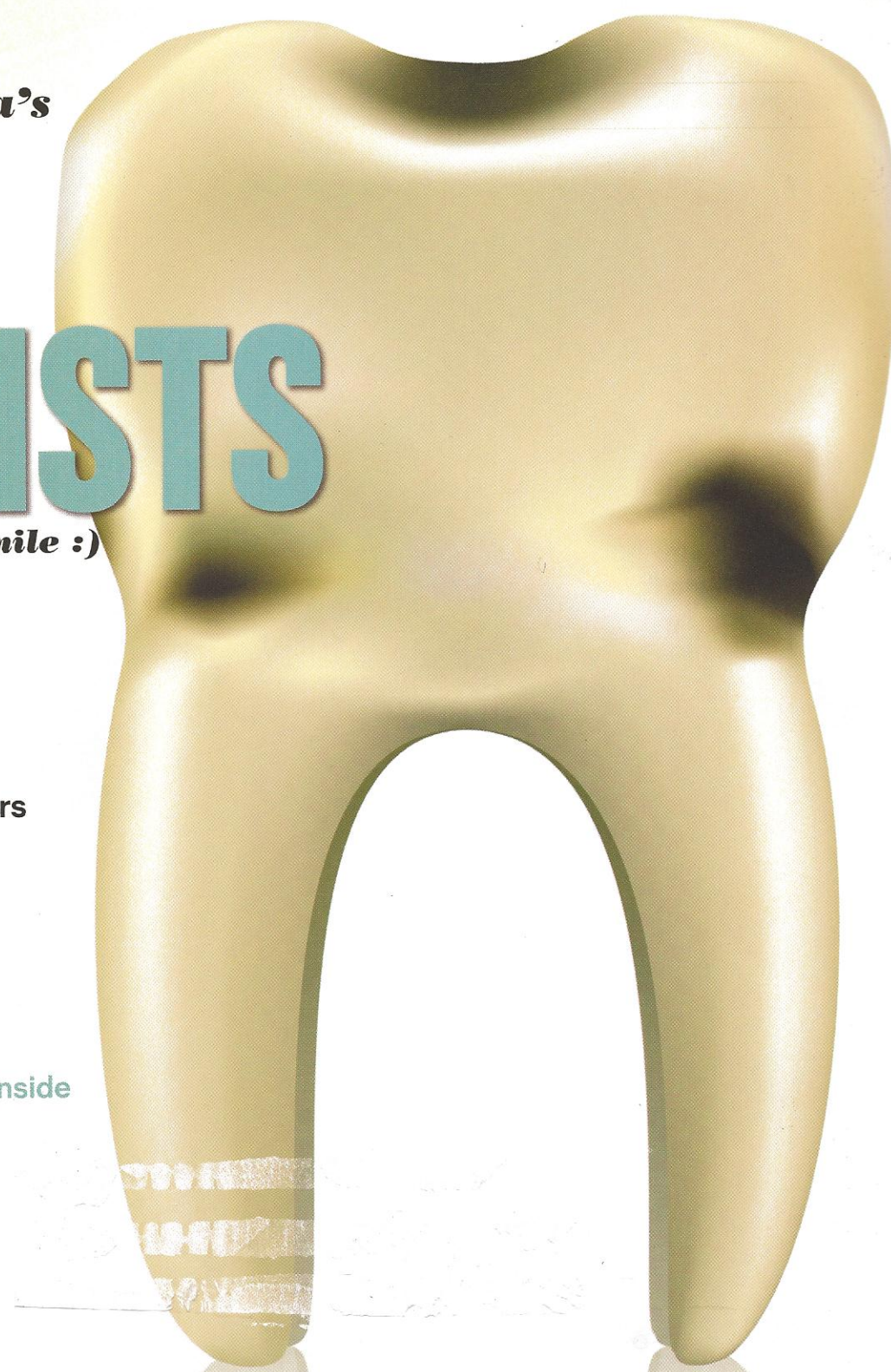
Meet the Gold Standard
Among Jax Financial Planners

CULTURAL ARTS CALENDAR

THE CURTAIN RISES ON FIRST
COAST PLAYS, CONCERTS,
FESTIVALS AND MORE!

BONUS: Ticket coupon book inside

Race For the Cure 17 Years & Running



\$3.95 JACKSONVILLEMAG.COM

