

An S.A.T. Preparatory Program That Works

Hauppauge High School on Long Island has reversed its declining S.A.T. scores.

JOSEPH SANACORE

Although universities may deny it, many high school seniors will rightly speculate that their S.A.T. performance was the main reason for not being accepted to the college of their choice, in spite of high grade-point averages, involvement in school activities, and substantial letters of reference. In response to this problem some schools have offered fragmented, "cramming" sessions to boost test results. Unfortunately, short-term attempts generally have not led to increased scores.

Hauppauge High School has taken another approach, implementing a long-term S.A.T. preparatory program in the English/reading department. Once a month, in grades nine, ten, and eleven, college-bound students complete short, structured exercises related to the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test: antonyms, sentence completions, word analogies, and reading comprehension passages. Afterward, the results are discussed and recorded on profile cards. At times students are grouped according to needs, so that one group receives intensive instruction in word analogies, while another group engages in reading comprehension exercises. These activities are frequently applied to broader language arts experiences. For example, antonyms, word analogies, and sentence completions can be related to language development, and reading comprehension questions can be meshed with reading, discussing, and interpreting literature. Thus, transfer of learning is assured—an outcome that supports

the rationale for using instructional time for S.A.T. preparation.

When eleventh- and twelfth-grade students are administered the actual Scholastic Aptitude Test, they have already been exposed to approximately 30 preparatory experiences over a three-year period. Such a long-term approach seems to be successful, since the Hauppauge mean score on the verbal section was 458, while the national mean score was 424. This 34-point difference reflects the highest verbal increase ever attained at the Hauppauge School District. It also reflects a sharp turn-around, because Hauppauge's verbal scores had been declining at a rate commensurate with national scores. External factors (such as population growth, density, distribution, and socioeconomic status) and internal factors (such as overall instructional programs) have not changed significantly and do not appear to have caused the increase.

The S.A.T. preparatory program came about as a result of growing concern about S.A.T. scores, which led to the formation of a committee consisting of English teachers, the English/reading coordinator, and the building principal. The committee met frequently to develop items representative of the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test and select commercially-produced materials suitable for each grade level. The committee also generated enthusiasm for using the monthly exercises as "alive" class activities rather than as "dry" paper-and-pencil tasks. The English/reading coordinator suggested recording students' progress on profile cards. He also volunteered

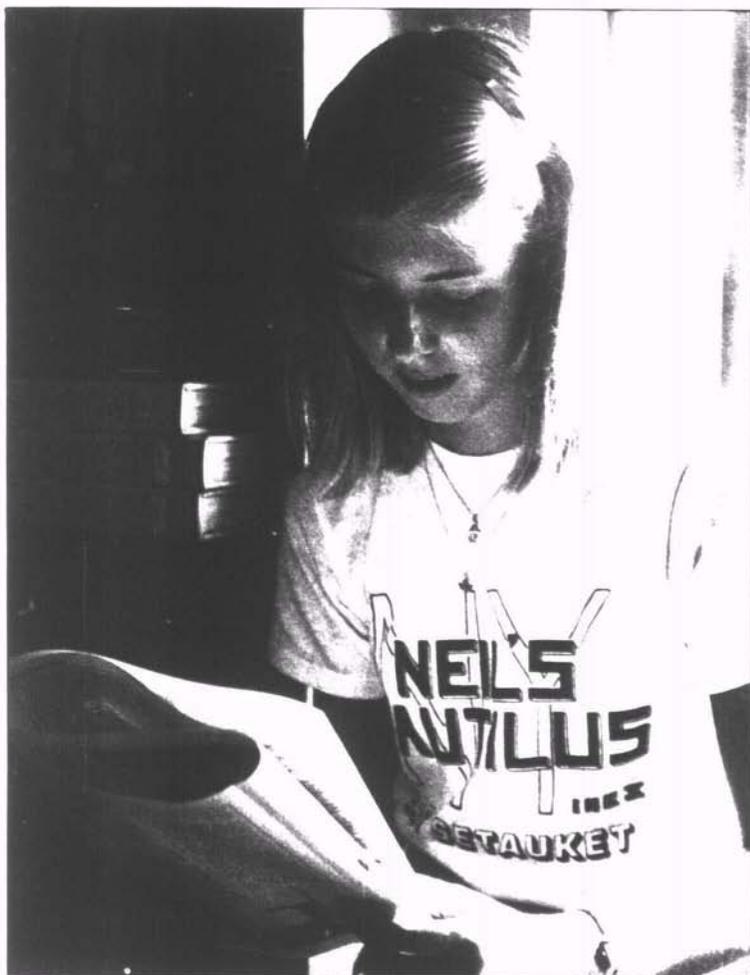
to collect the profiles on a quarterly basis so that progress could be reviewed systematically and strategies for improvement could be suggested on the basis of objective outcomes.

Hauppauge High's S.A.T. preparatory program reflects a variety of benefits:

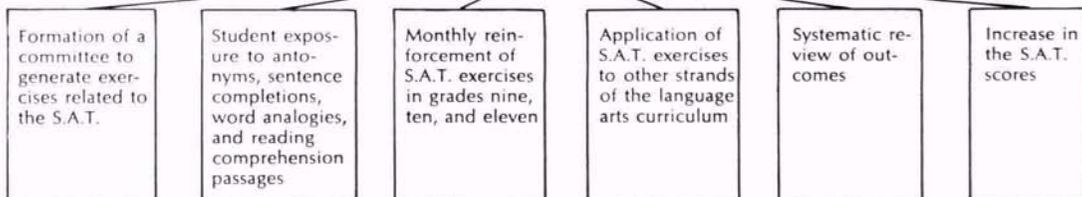
1. Monthly exercises are short and do not detract from other aspects of the English program.
2. Progress is noted on profile cards to give students concrete indications of success and to develop confidence as test takers.
3. Exercises are often meshed with substantive strands of the language arts curriculum, including literature, composition, language-grammar, reading, and listening-speaking. This synthesis lessens isolated teaching.
4. Reinforcement is provided during a three-year period, which seems to be more effective than short-term "cramming" sessions.
5. Upgraded scores have increased students' chances of being accepted at the college of their choice.
6. In New York State, Regents scholarships are awarded to students on the basis of S.A.T. scores. Hauppauge High has nearly doubled its number of Regents scholarship winners.
7. Public relations is enhanced for obvious reasons.

Although no S.A.T. preparatory program can replace a substantive English curriculum, both structures, if appropriately synthesized, can complement each other. Fortunately, Hauppauge High's English/reading department has maintained such a synthesis. ■

Joseph Sanacore is English/Reading Coordinator K-12, Hauppauge School District, Long Island, New York.



Highlights of (Verbal) S.A.T. Preparatory Program



Benefits for Students, Parents, and Educators

Copyright © 1981 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.