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Is generation Z really falling behind? Evidence from trends of SAT scores

Abstract: Public discussion regarding Generation Z's declining academic performance has increased. This study analyzes College Board SAT data (2017–2025), examining trends by subject, gender, parental education level, household income and school location. SAT scores declined across all groups, with math scores decreasing more than reading scores. Higher scores were consistently associated with male students, and higher parental education. Changes in demographic composition were assessed using chi-square tests and standardized residuals. Despite increasing proportions of demographic groups historically associated with higher SAT scores, overall average scores continued to decline, suggesting the presence of lurking or confounding variables. Potential contributing factors are proposed by publicly available datasets and recent educational research: addiction to internet games, and parental behaviors associated with higher educational attainment. These findings help understanding the academic behavior of college freshmen and warrant continued attention from educators, researchers, and policymakers.

This research project has been supervised by Cal Poly Pomona Prof. Jungwon 'Chris' Mun.

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