

Hanson's performance trends on standardized testing follows. A cautionary note, though, and this page as a preface: Trying to draw any firm conclusions about learning or teaching based on standardized test information should be approached very cautiously! Why?

While the whole (validity of) standardized enterprise is questionable at best, there's no real reason to subscribe to such testing unless *individual* results are analyzed. Looking at particular results can shine some light on student performance, aids teachers self-reflection, or serves as a catalyst to consider an individual student's needs. In the past months, Hanson faculty have 1) been asked to analyze standardized test results to better determine trends in student performance and 2) have been directed to incorporate standardized test formatting into their midterm and final exams so that orientation to the format itself reduces stress in students during standardized test taking. 3) This also goes to ways and means: One teacher commented that while the material was thoroughly covered and students were performing well on teacher-constructed tests, students' inability to perform well on a different (standardized) format was an awakening.

While colleges are slowly moving away from using standardized scores as the sole predictors of achievement and success, high schools are still quite locked into the standardized testing mill as the measure of all measures (which became a profitable industry when computer software design was in its infancy, and punch card readers became a fashionable opportunity to discriminate and isolate data sets).

Having been in education a long time, my particular conclusion is this: one repeated error is state and local governments' use of standardized test scores to judge school or teacher effectiveness. It never has worked, and one would be hard pressed to see any actual school improvement based on this measurement method, so I ask that readers of this information take it for what it's worth:

Standardized tests are *only one* indicator, one of hundreds of means, which teachers and schools can use to measure performance. All one has to do to offset the standardized mind-set is read Todd Farley's *Making the Grades: My Misadventures in the Standardized Testing Industry*-- an interview with Farley can be found by clicking on <http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2010/01/some-people-who-tell-all-about-the-industry-they-worked-in-are-greeted-as-brave-whistleblowers-and-embraced-by-the-media-and.html>, or *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* by Alfie Kohn, or *Learning Outside The Lines*, by Mooney and Cole written from the perspective of two Ivy League students with learning disabilities whose K-12 schooling was disastrously ineffective (in their narratives, they swear quite a bit, so their frank testimonies aren't for the squeamish or language sensitive, but the reading strategy suggestions they offer to high school students who battle attention deficit and hyperactivity really are quite good and consistent with the best pragmatic reading methods). Furthermore, even when specific programs, like computer-based mathematics tutorials supplement instruction, there is room to suggest that standardized tests do not accurately capture student ability (as stated in the discussion section of Johns Hopkins University research, [thebee@bestevidence.org](mailto:thebee@bestevidence.org)).

With these caveats in mind, standardized testing is still a reality (whether it truly tells us anything about a learner, besides his or her capability to perform well on standardized tests) and comforting for parents to know that our school does endeavor to arm students with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform as well as possible on these tests.



**Table 2: ACT Content Area and Composite Scores by Year**

The chart below shows more discrete section area scores; the Hanson score columns are highlighted in blue, state is light gray, national is dark gray; high scores in each category are emphasized in violet. Remember that standardized test scores are based on the questioned assumption that they predict success in post-secondary studies, so the baseline threshold scores developed by test companies are supposed key indicators: Benchmark Scores ('06-'09) follow and are the minimum assumed score to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a "B" or 75 % chance of obtaining a "C" in college courses:

Content Area	ACT Test	Benchmark
English	English	18
Algebra	Mathematics	22
Social Sciences	Reading	21
Biology	Science	24

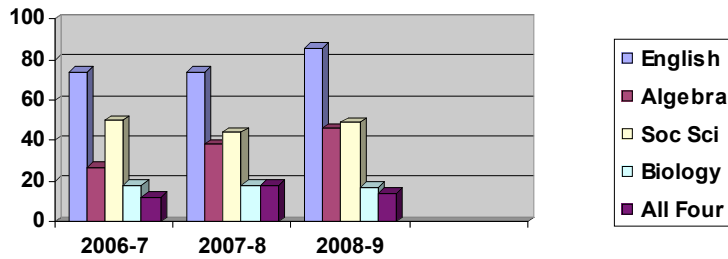
Thus, even if we subscribe to the notion that the standardized score is a valid reckoning (and we cannot with any certainty conclude this is true), then any charted score noted below which is lower than the benchmark indicated above is cause for concern. Of course, if we lend any credence to these scores, then it's best to look at individual scores to aid in assessing individual needs, but looking at the composite averages as a criterion for departmental or classroom assessment provides very little reliable information. Analyzing these scores in isolation without the context of all possible information we know about the student, types of test questions asked, or cohort of students tested is folly and dubious at best. Table 2:

	English			Mathematics			Reading			Science			Comp.		
	EH	ES	EN	MH	MS	MN	RH	RS	RN	SH	SS	SN	CH	S	N
02-03	20.8	19.7	20.3	19.7	18.9	20.6	21.3	19.8	21.2	20.6	19.6	20.8	20.8	19.6	20.8
03-04	21.1	19.9	20.4	20.4	19.2	20.7	21.0	19.9	21.3	21.3	19.7	20.9	21.0	19.8	20.9
04-05	19.8	19.9	20.4	19.4	19.2	20.7	19.6	19.8	21.3	20.2	19.7	20.9	19.9	19.8	20.9
05-06	20.0	20.3	20.6	18.5	19.4	20.8	20.1	20.1	21.4	19.0	19.9	20.9	19.6	20.1	21.1
06-07	20.7	20.3	20.7	20.1	19.5	21	20.5	20.2	21.5	19.7	19.9	21	20.3	20.1	21.2
07-08	20.9	20.5	20.6	19.7	19.7	21	20.5	20.5	21.4	19.5	19.5	20.8	20.3	20.3	21.1
08-09	21.4	20.3	20.6	19.9	19.6	21	21.3	20.2	21.4	20.2	20.0	20.9	20.8	20.1	21.1

EH=English Hanson, ES=English State, EN=English National  
 MH=Mathematics Hanson... RH=Reading Hanson...  
 SH=Science Hanson...CH=Composite Hanson...

~

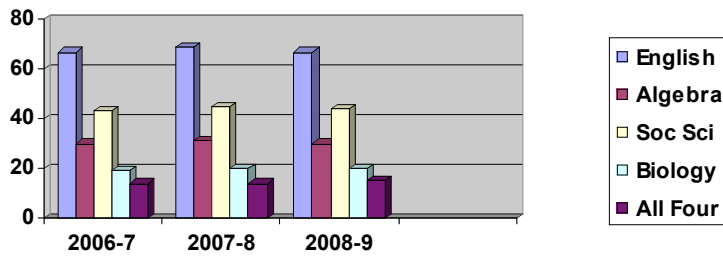
Based on the data in Chart B, then, the graphs and percentages seen below indicate the percentage of students that are *predicted* ready for college work. (Those highlighted in violet demonstrate top scores, in respective subject and population categories.)



English	<u>74</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>86</u>
Algebra	27	38	46
Soc Sci	50	44	49
Biology	18	18	17
All Four	12	18	14

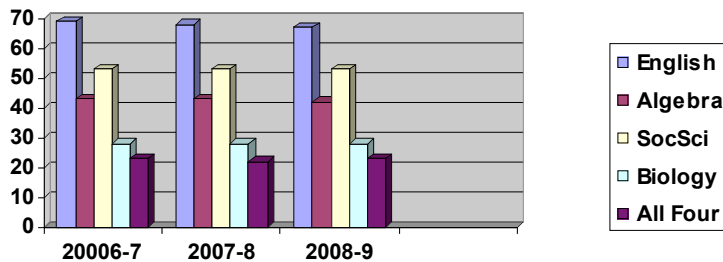
### **Hanson: Percentage of Students Ready for College-Level Coursework**

Notes: Hanson performs better than state and national %s ready in English; we're relatively competitive within the state in mathematics, but lag behind national %s; social sciences typically is a pretty good correlate to reading ability as well, and here we stand up to both national and state %s; in sciences we could do better; in our composite, especially compared to national levels, we're lagging, but this shouldn't be surprising. We've seen this in the press over periods of years, Louisiana lags behind, but should a private rural school in Louisiana be turning out higher %s? Hanson's battle cry is "Yes."



English	67	69	67
Algebra	30	31	30
Soc Sci	43	45	44
Biology	19	20	20
All Four	14	14	15

### **Louisiana: Percentage of Students Ready for College-Level Coursework**



English	69	68	67
Algebra	<u>43</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>42</u>
Soc Sci	<u>53</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>53</u>
Biology	<u>28</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>28</u>
All Four	<u>23</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>

### **National Avg.: Percentage of Students Ready for College-Level Coursework**