



Smart College Releases Guidance on Optimal Timing for ACT and SAT Preparation

July 17, 2026

Minneapolis, Minnesota - July 17, 2026 -

Smart College, a provider of college planning and test preparation services in the Twin Cities metro area, has released expert guidance addressing one of the most frequently asked questions from families: the optimal time for students to begin ACT or SAT preparation. The recommendations draw from the company's experience supporting students across diverse academic backgrounds through the college application process.

The timing of standardized test preparation significantly influences student outcomes. Factors such as current academic performance, target colleges, and individual learning needs determine the most effective start date. According to Smart College experts, the spring of sophomore year or early fall of junior year often serves as an effective starting point for structured preparation for many students. This timeframe allows sufficient opportunity to address content gaps while avoiding last-minute pressure.

"Many families delay preparation until late in junior year, but earlier foundational work frequently leads to stronger results," said Kristin Edwards, CEO of Smart College. "The ACT and SAT assess skills in algebra, geometry, grammar, reading, and other areas covered throughout high school. Beginning preparation with

enough lead time enables students to identify strengths and weaknesses and build skills progressively.?

Smart College advises students to complete a baseline practice test around the end of sophomore year or start of junior year. This diagnostic assessment, available through the company's free full-length proctored practice tests in simulated environments, informs personalized study plans. Students targeting competitive colleges or scholarships typically benefit from six to 12 months of consistent preparation, while those with strong academic foundations may achieve their goals with a more focused three to four-month period.

Preparation structure remains central to success. Smart College employs experienced, credentialed teachers and content-area specialists as tutors, all with substantial classroom teaching experience. Sessions emphasize concept mastery and test-taking strategies rather than rote practice alone. Regular progress monitoring helps adjust approaches based on student needs.

The guidance varies by high school stage. Freshmen and early sophomores benefit most from strengthening core academics through regular coursework. Late sophomores represent an ideal window for initial diagnostics and summer planning. Juniors enter the primary testing period, with most taking the ACT or SAT for the first time in winter or spring. Seniors have a narrower window focused on targeted improvements or retakes.

“Consistent preparation over time produces better retention than intensive short-term efforts,” Edwards added. “Integrating test preparation with school studies reinforces learning and helps manage overall student workload.”

This guidance aligns with Smart College's recent school-wide partnership with St. Augustine Academy in Inver Grove Heights. The collaboration integrates college planning and test preparation into the school environment starting in middle school, supporting proactive skill development across all student profiles.

Smart College offers flexible service packages and payment plans to support families at different income levels. Services are available both on-site at partner locations and through the company's network, including co-working spaces at The Reserve in Edina, Woodbury, and Roseville. These settings provide suitable environments for focused tutoring and advising.

The company's structured process guides families through college selection, applications, financial aid, and transitions. This comprehensive approach addresses gaps where many students navigate the process without professional support. Early program data indicate trends toward higher college application completion rates and increased scholarship opportunities among participants.

As the 2026-2027 school year begins, Smart College encourages families to evaluate current readiness and plan next steps. The company continues to support students of all backgrounds, from those pursuing selective institutions to those needing assistance with high school completion and postsecondary pathways.

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Smart College

Smart College offers personalized college advising and support services, helping students navigate their postsecondary journey.

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