

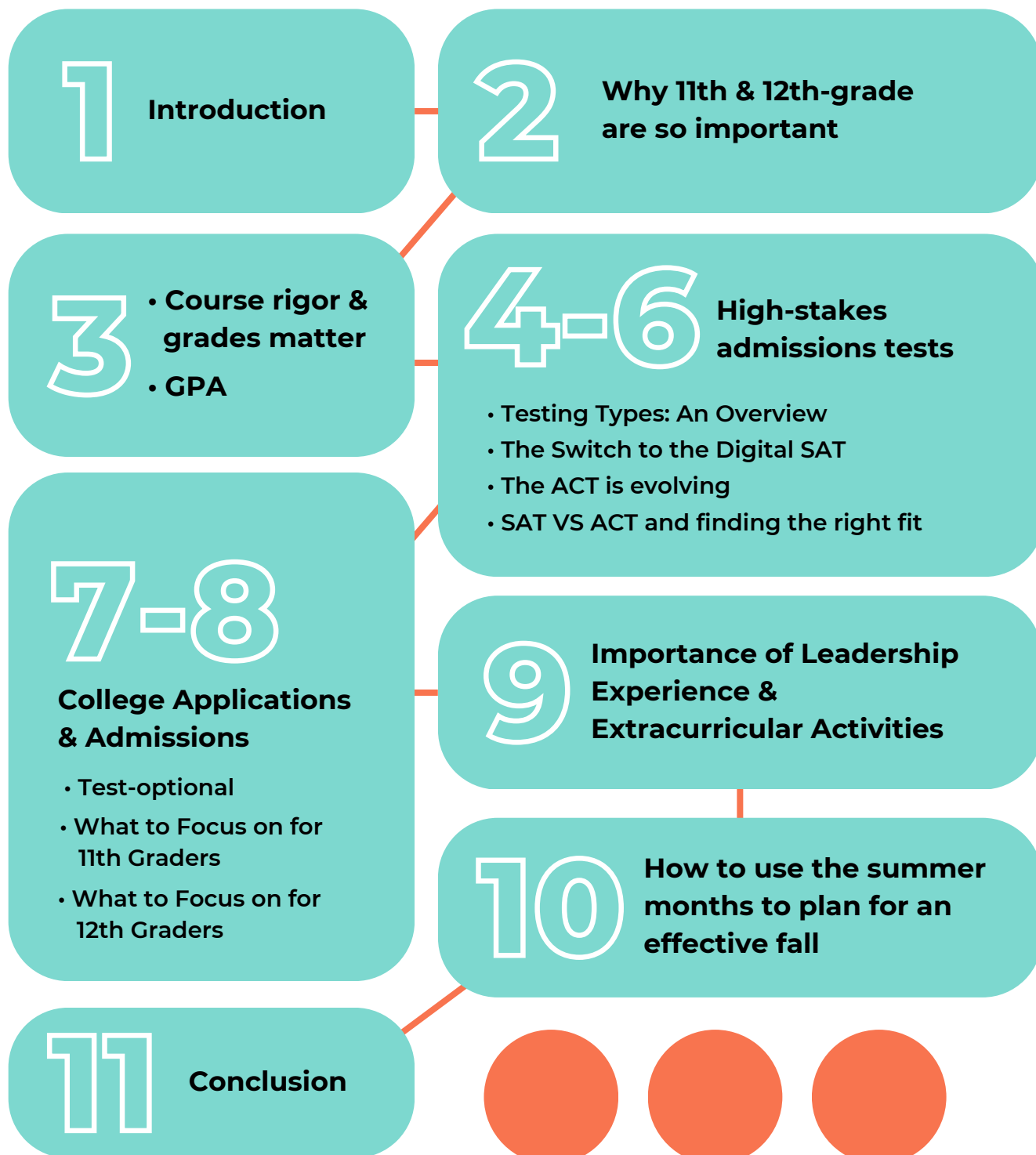
# eBook

## Preparing for High-Stakes Academic Years

A guide for 11th and 12th grade families



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# Introduction

Welcome to "Navigating High-Stakes Years in High School," an eBook designed to provide valuable guidance and support to parents of 11th and 12th graders. This crucial period sets the stage for college admissions and future success.

In this eBook, we will explore why these grade levels are so important and delve into various aspects such as course rigor, GPA, standardized testing, extracurricular activities, college applications, and effective summer planning strategies.



# Why 11th and 12th grade (the high-stakes years) are so important?



## College Admissions:

Colleges and universities carefully evaluate a student's activities during junior and senior year of high school, paying close attention to grades, test scores, course rigor, and extracurricular involvement. Preparing for these years will help set your teen up for success as they navigate the rest of their educational journey and beyond.



## Extracurricular Opportunities:

High school offers many opportunities beyond the classroom, such as internships, research projects, leadership roles, and community service initiatives. By preparing for high-stakes academic years, students can proactively seek out and maximize these opportunities to acquire soft skills, career exposure, leadership skills, and more that will aid them in the transition after high school.



## Academic Challenges and Opportunities:

Advanced Placement (AP) courses, honors programs, and specialized academic tracks become available to students during high school. Adequate preparation allows students to take advantage of challenging coursework that can further develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. These rigorous academic pursuits not only promote personal growth, but they also prepare students for the academic rigors they will face in college.



## Personal Growth and Maturity:

Beyond academic achievement, high-stakes academic years offer ample opportunities for personal growth and development. These years often coincide with important milestones such as driving privileges and other responsibilities. Effective preparation equips students with the executive function skills—like organization, time management, and general discipline—to navigate these milestones successfully. By proactively preparing for the challenges ahead, students can cultivate resilience, independence, and self-confidence.

## Course rigor and grades matter

In the competitive landscape of high school education, course rigor and GPA play a pivotal role in shaping a student's academic journey and future opportunities. Here's how:



### College Preparation:

Colleges and universities seek students who challenge themselves academically. By *adding the right amount* of rigorous classes & programs to their schedule, students demonstrate their readiness for higher education and their ability to handle demanding coursework.



### Alignment to Future Goals:

Course selection allows students to explore their interests and passions. By *enrolling in subjects aligned with their career goals*, students can gain valuable insights, discover new passions, and make informed decisions about their future paths.



### Key Differentiator:

Taking challenging courses *sets students apart from their peers*. It shows their willingness to go above and beyond, showcasing their dedication, discipline, and intellectual curiosity to college admissions officers.



### College Credit:

AP and IB courses provide an opportunity for students to *earn college credit while still in high school*. Performing well on AP or IB exams can lead to advanced standing, allowing students to bypass introductory courses in college and explore more specialized coursework.

## GPA

A **grade point average (GPA)** is a numeric representation of a student's academic performance. While high schools often report GPA on a 4.0 scale, where the top grade is an A and equals 4.0, scale scores vary from school to school. Here's why maintaining a strong GPA is crucial:



### College Admission:

GPA is the most significant factor considered during the college admissions process. Admissions officers use GPA to assess a student's academic aptitude, work ethic, and ability to succeed in college-level courses.



### Scholarships and Financial Aid:

Many scholarships and financial aid programs rely on GPA as a determining factor. A strong GPA increases the chances of securing merit-based scholarships, making college more affordable.



### Academic Opportunities:

A high GPA opens doors to various academic opportunities, such as honors programs, research opportunities, and academic awards. These experiences can enrich a student's high school journey and enhance their college applications.

# High-stakes admissions tests

## Testing Types: An Overview

One important decision your student will face during the college admissions process is choosing between the ACT and SAT—the two primary standardized tests accepted by colleges and universities. Understanding the differences between these exams and guiding your child in making an informed choice can significantly impact their college admissions journey. Here's what you need to know about the tests:

- They both cover the same topics
- Both are used for college admissions decisions and awarding merit-based scholarships
- Most colleges don't have a preference for which you submit
- Neither the ACT nor SAT are "harder" than the other
- Some students may do better on one test over the other, but this is not always the case



# ACT<sup>®</sup>

To learn more about the ACT, dates, and deadlines, [click here.](#)

 CollegeBoard

# SAT<sup>®</sup>

To learn more about the SAT, dates, and deadlines, [click here.](#)

## The Switch to the Digital SAT

For the class of 2025 and younger, the College Board is transitioning the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT from pencil-and-paper format to digital format! Like most families, you're probably wondering what this means for your child.

### **1** What is changing?

The test is now given on each student's laptop or iPad a secure testing application called "Bluebook."

- The test has been shortened by 45 minutes, down to approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes in total length.
- The test is now adaptive and will change its difficulty in response to student performance during the testing experience.
- In the Reading & Writing section, the test no longer uses lengthy passages, and each question has its own short (<100 words) passage.
- In the Math section, students will be provided with a built-in digital graphing calculator. They can now use a calculator on all questions—previously, there were some questions where a calculator was not allowed.


# High-stakes admissions tests

## 2 Who is being affected and when?

For students in the U.S., the first digital test will be the Digital PSAT in October of 2023.

This means that rising juniors, the class of 2025, are the first to be affected by the change, and rising seniors will not be impacted by the Digital SAT or PSAT.

The first Digital SAT administration for U.S. students will be in March 2024, and once the test moves to a digital format, there's no going back to the previous pencil-and-paper format.

 Interested in learning more about the new Digital SAT?

**Free Webinar**

**Understanding the New Digital SAT and PSAT**

**Register here**



Visit the [Revolution Prep Digital PSAT/SAT website](#) to access:

- Digital PSAT/SAT FAQ's for students and parents
- a walkthrough of the new digital testing format
- sign-up for a practice exam, and
- engage in a demo of the new test!

## + The ACT is evolving

While the ACT has offered online testing for state and district testers since 2016, starting December 2023, the ACT will begin to offer the ACT test online for test takers on national test dates, as well! With to goal of giving students greater autonomy over their testing experience, the goal is to provide students with further choice, flexibility, and accessibility.

To start, the ACT will offer online testing in December 2023 as a limited pilot for 5,000 testers at a select number of testing centers to allow for a controlled implementation, to consider feedback, and to ensure the best possible testing experience for students.

Registration for the first ACT online national test date in December will open July 2023.

### What's changing?

Not a whole lot! While the digital SAT is adaptive in nature, the ACT will not be. The evolution of the ACT means that students have a choice in a testing experience that best suits their testing preferences. Score reporting, testing fees, and the fee waiver program will remain the same for both online and paper & pencil testing options.

To support students in the online testing environment, additional accessibility features will be available, such as:

- Text-to-speech functionality
- Zoom in/out, making text larger or smaller
- Answer masking



Interested in having your student take a practice ACT before the read deal? [Sign-up here!](#)

# High-stakes admissions tests

## SAT VS ACT and finding the right fit

Understanding the basics for each test and knowing your own strengths as a test taker will help you and your student(s) make the best decision. Let's take a closer look at the key differentiators for each test:

	ACT	SAT	Digital SAT
<b>Duration</b>	3 hours (w/o essay)	3 hours	2 hours, 14 minutes
<b>Score Range</b>	1-36	400-1600	400-1600
<b>Administered</b>	Pencil & Paper OR Digital	Pencil & Paper	Digital Adaptive
<b>Content Covered</b>	Math, English, Reading, Science & Writing (optional)	Math, and Reading & Writing	Math, and Reading & Writing
<b>Reading &amp; Writing Passages</b>	Reading: 4 passages – 800 words each English: 5 passages – 350 words each	Reading: 5 passages – 500-750 words each Writing & Language: 4 passages – 450 words each	Every Reading & Writing question has its own short passages – 100 words each
<b>Science Section</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Math Weight</b>	25%	50%	50%
<b>Order of Difficulty</b>	Only math goes from easy to hard	Only math goes from easy to hard	Adaptive: Depending on how student does in first module, they are taken to an easier or harder second module
<b>Big Challenge</b>	Time Crunch	Critical Thinking Skills	Critical Thinking Skills

### Making the decision—take both and compare the results!

- 1 Have your child take a full-length practice SAT/PSAT or Digital PSAT/SAT and a practice ACT
- 2 Review results from each exam and see how they compare on a concordance chart
- 3 Discuss with a school college counselor and/or Revolution Prep Academic Advisor to see if there is an advantage to taking one test over the other



**Revolution Prep offers practice exams for the SAT/PSAT, Digital SAT/PSAT, and ACT**



# College Applications and Admissions

## Test-optional

In response to the pandemic, the number of test-optional colleges has nearly doubled, with *over 80% of institutions now maintaining some form of test-optional policy*, including prestigious and selective schools.

The concept of "test-optional" can vary widely between schools, leaving many unsure about whether or not to take standardized tests and when or if to submit scores.

**Test-optional admissions generally mean that colleges and universities do not require applicants to submit standardized test scores, such as the SAT or ACT.** However, there are three different levels of test-optional schools:



### True Test-Optional

Schools don't consider test scores at all and ensure that students aren't disadvantaged by not submitting scores.



### Standard Test-Optional

Schools evaluate the presence or absence of test scores in the context of the applicant's overall profile, focusing on alignment with the institution's priorities. Students highly aligned with the school may succeed without submitting scores, while those less aligned may benefit from strong scores.



### Test-Preferred

Schools, although appearing test-optional, still place significant importance on test scores and may require supplemental essays justifying the decision not to submit scores.



Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to deciding whether or not to apply with test scores. Each student's unique circumstances and the policies of the schools they are interested in require a tailored approach. It is crucial for parents and students to *research individual institutions' policies and work closely with counselors* to navigate the test-optional landscape effectively.

## What to Focus on for 11th Graders

College applications are sent during the fall semester of senior year, so *this is the last academic year that is fully reflected in the GPA that appears on a student's academic transcript.*

For students who have received lower marks during the first two years of high school, it's important to take steps to improve their grades. For students who are able to develop the content and skills mastery to improve their academics, *colleges do take into consideration the trend in student grades over the course of high school.*



**Reflect:** Did you know that the average student has lost 1/3 of an academic year's worth of learning post-pandemic? If your student is in need of additional support- whether to close learning gaps, accelerate learning, or start preparing for the rigorous coursework ahead, we can help!

For over 20 years, Revolution Prep has supported millions of students in closing academic learning gaps, accelerating learning, and increasing students' confidence, resulting in better grades, higher test scores, and critical skills that transcend the classroom. Learn about our [academic tutoring support here!](#)

### Junior year is a marathon, not a sprint—Avoid burnout and stay motivated.



#### All students as juniors should be taking classes in the following areas:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> <li>• Math</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Social Science,</li> <li>• and Foreign Language</li> </ul> | <p>Most students will take...</p> <p>Algebra 2, Trigonometry, or Pre-Calculus for Math.<br/>Biology, Chemistry, or Physics for Science.<br/>U.S. History for Social Science.</p> |
|---|--|



#### Explore new subjects through electives

Electives will allow students to explore new subject matters, and identify potential interests, to which they may not have had prior exposure.



#### Finish up standardized testing

Taking the PSAT/NMSQT® early and either the ACT® or SAT® before the end of junior year will allow a student, if necessary, to sit for the exam again early senior year.

Juniors taking the PSAT/NMSQT® can achieve National Merit Scholarship recognition based upon how their scores compare to other juniors across the country and within their own state.

Not only does achieving National Merit recognition allow for a student to potentially receive money for college, but this achievement is also noted on a student's college application.

## What to Focus on for 12th Graders

The first pressing priority for high school seniors is managing their college application process. This involves a number of priorities, so it's easy for parents and students to lose track of things during the frantic rush to assemble and submit applications. Students should track this work in one central place, noting the deadlines and required components for each college they're choosing to apply to.

Sorting out the required admissions essays is also a critical consideration. Students may find that what originally appeared to be five different essays can actually be only two different core concepts that they need to develop.

Getting the appropriate help in writing these essays is key for putting the best foot forward in representing their story to college admissions officers.

### Students need to stay motivated and learn to embrace change during senior year. "Senioritis" is real and must be counteracted.

To effectively fight off this decline in interest and motivation, students can connect the work they're doing in class to their personal interests, maintain a daily or weekly checklist of required tasks, and try to get adequate sleep on a nightly basis.



#### Retake tests for point improvements

A 50–100-point improvement on the SAT® can meaningfully impact a student's odds of gaining admission. Students' brains are still actively developing the skills these exams assess.



#### Think like a college student

The concepts and skills developed during AP® and IB coursework *directly lead into college-level material*, and a student's willingness to truly engage in this work and achieve their best will set them up for success at the college level.



#### Grades still matter, even after applications are submitted!

While colleges initially only see a combination of 9th-11th grade grades, plus a mid-year check on senior year grades, it's a fact that *almost every college will require students to submit a final grade report*.

It's not unheard of for colleges to rescind acceptances when students exhibit a drop in grades during their senior year.



Is your student in need of additional college essay writing support? We can help unleash their writing potential- [click the flyer to see how!](#)

# Importance of Leadership Experience and Extracurricular Activities

As parents of juniors and seniors, you want to ensure that your child's college application stands out among the sea of applicants. Beyond academic achievements, leadership experience and extracurricular activities play a crucial role in shaping a well-rounded student and capturing the attention of college admissions officers. Depth vs. breadth matters- instead of participating in many activities, *thoughtfully consider the ones that will help your student to grow the skillsets they're looking to acquire.*

## Benefits of Leadership experience and extracurricular activities:



### Demonstrating Initiative and Passion:

Demonstrating long-term involvement in a few activities highlights dedication, growth, and the ability to make a meaningful impact.



### Leadership Development:

Leadership positions, such as club president, team captain, or community service coordinator, demonstrate your child's ability to take charge, motivate others, and make a positive difference.



### Personal Growth and Character Development:

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for personal growth, building resilience, teamwork, and developing important life skills such as time management, problem-solving, and communication.



### Highlighting Unique Talents and Perspectives:

Colleges strive to create diverse and dynamic communities. Extracurricular involvements allow your child to showcase their unique talents, perspectives, and contributions.



### Differentiation Factor:

In a competitive applicant pool, extracurricular involvements can help your child stand out and create a memorable impression on admissions officers, setting them apart from other candidates with similar academic profiles.



### Community Engagement and Impact:

Engaging in extracurricular activities fosters a sense of community, empathy, and social responsibility. Extracurricular involvements that align with your child's academic interests demonstrate their dedication to furthering their knowledge and applying it in real-world contexts.



### Networking and Recommendation Letters:

Active participation in extracurricular activities offers opportunities for mentorship, networking, and meaningful connections. These relationships can lead to strong recommendation letters, validating your child's character and potential to excel in college.

# How to use the summer months to plan for an effective fall

For most teenagers, high school years are marked by a variety of pressures from different directions. They often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they need to accomplish and may experience conflicting emotions about the future after high school. Parents, on the other hand, may observe a growing distance between themselves and their teenagers as their child begins to assert their independence. They may also notice skill gaps in their child's ability to manage time, prioritize tasks, and regulate emotions effectively.

**Summer is a great time to acknowledge and address these feelings to create a conducive environment for success.**

## Practical steps for teenagers and parents to take during the summer:

### 1 Prioritize a Healthy Balance:

Encourage a balance of relaxation and stimulation during summer vacation, while emphasizing the importance of taking breaks from social media for true rest.

### 2 Identify Educational Gaps and Risks:

Assess your child's educational gaps and potential challenges they may face in the upcoming years, considering past struggles and future difficulties.

### 3 Allocate Time for Academic Preparation:

Set aside specific time each week for your child to work on developing the skills they need for the next academic year, with consistent short sessions and independent application to reinforce learning.

### 4 Foster Social Interaction:

Encourage your child to engage with peers during their free time to develop social skills and self-regulation, providing essential downtime and fun opportunities.

### 5 Promote Personal Growth & Wellbeing:

Help your child set specific goals for the upcoming academic year, both academically and personally, and discuss strategies to achieve them. Dedicate time for developing new habits and consider summer volunteer programs or internships related to their interests.

### 6 ACT/SAT Preparation & College Essays:

Set aside specific time each week for your child to work on developing the skills they need for the next academic year, with consistent short sessions and independent application to reinforce learning.

### 7 College Exploration and Planning:

Visit nearby colleges or participate in virtual tours to help your child explore different campuses and narrow down their preferences. Support them in researching scholarships and financial aid options, understanding requirements, and gathering necessary documentation.

**By following these steps, parents can proactively support their child during the summer, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges of the 11th and 12th grade years and setting them up for long-term success.**



**Download the planning workbook based on your student's upcoming grade level!**



**"Rising Junior Planning Workbook" for a summer action plan!**



**"Rising Senior Planning Workbook" for a summer action plan!**

# Conclusion

By understanding the importance of course rigor, GPA, standardized testing, extracurricular activities, college applications, and effective summer planning strategies, parents can guide their children towards success in college admissions and beyond.

We, at Revolution Prep, get to witness the transformation that students experience when they apply these practices in their junior and senior years every day.

## Check out some of their stories!



### **My son is enjoying the learning experience provided by Revolution Prep**

As educators ourselves, my spouse and I witnessed exemplary instructional practices and a feedback system that focus on personal student growth and goal-setting as well as effective parent communication. Our son actually asked us for another round of instruction, which pretty much tells us how meaningful this learning experience has been for him and how Revolution Prep helped him develop a growth mindset towards his college aspirations. We have gladly decided to sign up for another 24-hour package and are confident that this will really help him improve his SAT scores.



To learn more about Revolution Prep and the academic, executive function, and tutoring support we provide students nationwide, visit our website: <https://www.revolutionprep.com/>



### **5 Stars!**

My teen daughter has been tutored through Revolution Prep over a year. The tutor is professional, able to teach a wide range of subjects, and reaches my daughter in a kind way. She has helped her get organized, motivated, and acquire life skills on top of academics. The tutor was able to prep her for the PSAT and ISEE exams. My daughter's grades have improved, but more importantly, her skills to get there. Tutoring is highly recommended. I appreciate all the webinars and information sent out by email. All the college preparation can be confusing and this has helped. There is a lot of valuable information. 5 stars!

### **What a find!**

I could not be more impressed with Katherine and revolution prep. She was a perfect match for my daughter. With such a stressful process, Katherine is not only teaching her the skills to perform she is building her confidence that she is prepared. In this covid climate it is uncertain if tests will be optional. Katherine is not just teaching to the test, we are using the summer to get my daughter ready for concepts in math she will need this upcoming year. It's a win-win all around.

