JUST // EQUATIONS

July 7, 2026

Regent Maria Anguiano, Chair
University of California Board of Regents
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, California 94607

Mark Robinson, Vice Chair
University of California Board of Regents
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, California 94607

RE: Remarks of the Chair of the Academic Senate (on BOARS' convening of a standardized test scores workgroup)

Dear Chair Anguiano and Vice Chair Robinson,

My name is Andrea McChristian, and I am the national policy director at Just Equations —a California-based policy institute that reenvisions the role of math in ensuring educational equity. I write today to comment on BOARS' plan to convene a standardized test scores workgroup as part of its 2026-2027 roadmap on first-year admissions. Given the recent attention to certain STEM faculty calling for reinstatement of the SAT/ACT requirement in math, we write at this early juncture to (1) express our opposition to the reinstatement of the SAT/ACT requirement in the first-year admissions process and (2) explain why reinstatement will not address the underlying issue of college math preparation.

I begin with the issue of math preparation, Just Equations' core focus area. A November 2025 report from UC San Diego first called on the UC system to reverse its position on standardized testing in response to a claimed increase in admission of students viewed as unprepared for college math. While math achievement declines across the nation are real as a result of long-term trends like the pandemic, absenteeism, and the effects of social media, Just Equations and other policy experts have cautioned against drawing broad policy implications from the UCSD report and UC faculty letter, particularly given questionable analyses and lack of transparency around math testing practices.

As a June 2026 op-ed by UC Berkeley law professor Jonathan D. Glater illustrates, a return to considering standardized tests in the admissions process is not an answer to math preparation concerns and would "shut students out who otherwise would be on UC campuses." Specifically, reinstatement of the SAT/ACT requirement would run counter to UC's mission as a public institution, would not solve the issue of assessing college math readiness, and would ignore the important work currently underway within the UC to ensure students are math ready without the need for standardized tests.

Reinstating the SAT/ACT requirement does not square with the UC's mission as a public higher education institution. Regents' policy requires the system to enroll a student body that is representative of California's population. The UC also has long valued its success in "providing students with access to a world-class education regardless of their income and background." Reinstating the SAT/ACT requirement does not align with these goals. Research shows how success on these tests is largely shaped by socioeconomic factors such as a student's race and family income. Indeed, these concerns were at the heart of the settled *Smith v. Regents* case, which ended the SAT/ACT requirement in UC admissions in the first place. The elimination of the standardized testing requirement has led to record diversity in the UC's admitted students with persistence and graduation rates remaining stable. The UC should be particularly committed to diversity among its prospective STEM majors because of the underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and lower-income individuals in the STEM field, an issue the UC has explicitly recognized and in which the state has invested. Given the growing demand for a diverse STEM labor pool, reinstating the SAT/ACT requirement would also contradict the UC's commitment to fostering economic mobility and supporting workforce needs.

Admissions tests are not an appropriate measure of college math readiness. A student's SAT/ACT test score is simply a reflection of their ability to take a costly test on a specific day, not a sufficient measure of their ability to succeed in college math. Indeed, UC research shows that high-school GPA is the strongest predictor of college performance. Standardized tests in admissions screen out promising students without improving math readiness. As Bjorn Birnir, UC Santa Barbara math professor and math department chair told EdSource, all a return to standardized tests "will do is keep students out of mathematics, and it may push some students, especially underrepresented students, out of the UC system." Further, if the UC concludes that it must use an additional assessment in the admissions process to test students' college math readiness, the Smarter Balanced Assessment, which the workgroup is also reviewing, provides a viable alternative. The Smarter Balanced Assessment is already tied to California state math standards, does as well as the SAT in predicting college outcomes, and is a free test that all California students already take.

Focusing on the SAT/ACT ignores the innovative work already being done within the UC system to address math readiness. Rather than returning to a policy that runs

counter to its mission and does not measure students' college math preparation, the UC should instead assess and build upon the cutting-edge work being done across California's higher education system, including within the UC, to promote students' success in college math and STEM. For example, UCLA, through its redesigned Mathematics for Life Scientists sequence, has shown that biology students can thrive in subsequent courses without a standard calculus class. In UC Riverside's Principles of Calculus course, another promising redesign, students use spatial learning strategies, adaptive technology and culturally relevant content. Cuyamaca College and Sonoma State University have also reported success with placing STEM majors directly into calculus, providing additional support instead of prerequisite courses. A failure to meaningfully review the impact of these courses and other forward-thinking innovations supported by the state, and how they can potentially be expanded, conflicts with the UC's goal of ensuring students' success.

Given these concerns, what *is* an appropriate solution to ensure incoming UC students have the math skills necessary for success? Instead of returning to standardized tests that will not advance this goal, the UC system should seize this moment to strengthen intersegmental partnerships to improve students' math readiness. This requires working with the CSU, California Community Colleges, California's K-12 education system, and representatives from California's employer community to evaluate and implement the cross-system strategies that are necessary to ensure college and career success. Through this alignment—supported by appropriate resources—the state can make sure that students receive the math education they need throughout their educational experiences.

In doing so, California will join states across the country focused on strengthening K-16 math education, as we outlined in our 2025 report *Aligned by Design: How Cross-System Math Alignment Can Improve Students' Pathways from High School to College*. Such alignment would build upon the Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates' 2025 statement on math competencies, the investments of the California Education Learning Lab, and the commitments of the new California Education Interagency Council.

We urge the UC Regents to engage in this cross-system analysis to strengthen math readiness in the state, a process that goes beyond the limited examination of admissions tests.

With regard to the standardized test workgroup, we also call for:

- A transparent process and opportunity for students and families, policy experts, and others to speak in a public forum about why returning to these tests will not support student college math readiness.

- A rigorous review of claims about UC math preparation that have received significant media attention but little scholarly scrutiny.

A return to the SAT/ACT may seem like a quick fix, but it is not a remedy to today's math skills decline. Ensuring California students' college success requires solving the issue of math readiness, not returning to a standardized testing process that risks failing some of California's most promising students.

Sincerely,

Andrea McChristian
National Policy Director
Just Equations