

TestPrepGurus

Last year Test Prep Gurus awarded more than \$30,000 in 1-on-1 test prep scholarships to prepare students for the ACT and SAT. Test Prep Gurus works closely with several independent high schools and the A Better Chance foundation to identify high-achieving students in need. The following piece tells the story of Anthony Palacio, recipient of a Test Prep Gurus scholarship.

As a naturally gifted student in a public middle school, Anthony Palacio earned grades that put him at the top of his class. The *A Better Chance* foundation saw his potential and identified him as a student with all the promise of a bright future if given the requisite support and access to financial resources.

Through the foundation, previously unavailable options opened up for Anthony. He soon visited The Webb Schools, an elite boarding school in Claremont, California. “As soon as I saw Webb, I fell in love with it. I only wanted to go there,” said Anthony. He lived up to his potential at Webb, earning nearly straight A’s, enrolling in multiple AP courses, and excelling on the school’s debate team. However, despite his strong grades and natural talent, Anthony’s counselor told him that he needed a SAT score of at least 2100 (on a scale of 2400) in order to be considered by the country’s most selective colleges. To put Anthony’s task in perspective, a score of 2100 on the SAT is only achieved by 3% of students across the nation.

Anthony’s college counselor at the Webb Schools suggested he apply for a Test Prep Gurus scholarship. On the basis of an excellent essay and a sterling recommendation from his counselor, Test Prep Gurus awarded Anthony a scholarship to cover the costs of a 12-week 1-on-1 tutoring package.

Anthony’s first diagnostic SAT practice test posted a total score of 1960. This score would be more than acceptable for the majority of schools across the country; however, given Anthony’s lofty ambitions for college (his list would include a realistic “reach” for Yale if he could improve his scores), it fell far short of his counselor’s recommended minimum score of 2100.



i: Anthony Palacio, at The Webb Schools

Test Prep Gurus assigned Anthony one verbal tutor and one math tutor, each of whom had scored a perfect 800 on their respective sections of the SAT. Anthony admitted that when it came to math he was besieged by “a sense of desperation.” However, his math tutor showed him how to avoid numerous traps on the math section, as well as how to utilize his strong problem-solving skills to answer a number of challenging problems using very little math at all.

The tutor also observed that Anthony omitted too many questions. To many students, skipping questions seems like a logical strategy, as the SAT penalizes test takers a quarter of a point for incorrect answers, but does not penalize them for omitted questions. However, Test Prep Gurus encourages students in Anthony’s ability range to guess aggressively. Even though an incorrect answer reduces

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a quarter of a point, a correct answer adds a full point. In other words, it takes four incorrect answers to negate a single correct answer. Anthony was encouraged to think about each question as an opportunity to gain points, rather than lose them. Utilizing this strategy, Anthony gained confidence in his ability to whittle down even the most difficult math questions to a limited number of likely answer choices and make educated guesses accordingly.

Anthony’s verbal tutor quickly noted that Anthony struggled with a number of subject/verb agreement problems on his mock SAT exam. “Anthony left quite a few points on the table with his initial essay. He consistently generated excellent evidence to support his essay theses; however, he often fell short when it came to explicitly connecting his examples to his theses. He also had a habit of assuming that his reader held the same basic assumptions that he did.” They immediately set to work to correct these issues.

As the program progressed over several weeks, Anthony’s math tutor began to be more frank and direct with Anthony concerning his approach to preparing for the math section. The tutor noticed that Anthony often didn’t thoroughly review certain math problems. Whether it was permutations or advanced geometry, the more difficulty Anthony had with a specific content-area, the less likely he was to spend extra time working on it. The tutor explained that if Anthony were going to reach his goal, he needed to flip this paradigm: “spend more time on the concepts and problem types that trouble you the most, not less.”

Six weeks into the program, Anthony’s ability to read quickly (with increased retention) had markedly improved. As a result, he required increasingly less time to finish the verbal sections. In fact, he began to finish each twenty-five minute verbal section with five or more minutes left to spare during his practice exams. His tutor then encouraged Anthony to adjust his approach by intentionally slowing down in order to use all of the time at his disposal to ensure that he did not make any avoidable mistakes or fall into any of the typical SAT traps contained in the verbal sections.

Anthony’s hard work reaped results on subsequent mock SAT exams (see chart below). However, after eleven weeks of studying, he was unable to cross the threshold of a total score over 2100. He feared that his scores had plateaued. With encouragement from his tutoring team, Anthony continued to complete his homework and remained an eager and active participant in his tutoring lessons -- but inside he felt he had reached his personal ceiling: “It looked like this was... the peak of my potential.”

Practice Summary		<i>Essay</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Total</i>
2014-02-09	Official SAT Study Guide V2 #2 -	9	700	590	670	1960
2014-03-29	Official SAT Study Guide V2 #1 -	8	740	650	690	2080
2014-04-11	Official SAT Study Guide V2 #4 (V1)	9	720	600	730	2050
2014-04-26	Official SAT Study Guide V2 #5 (V1)	9	710	650	730	2090
Best		9	740	650	730	

ii: Anthony Palacio's practice test results, prior to his official SAT exam.

Often times, just the right amount of pressure on test day can help a student to perform at their best; however, too much pressure can result in underperformance. The Test Prep Gurus team (his two tutors and the supervising Program Director) suspected that Anthony’s scores were being held back by the pressure he was placing on himself to score above 2100. In a team meeting just prior to the official

exam they concluded that the best assistance they could provide to Anthony was to attempt to relieve a little bit of that pressure in order to unleash Anthony's true ability. During the final session before the official exam, Anthony's verbal tutor acknowledged the pressure Anthony was feeling and told him something very important in an effort to ratchet down the anxiety: "You are completely prepared for this exam. There is nothing to be afraid of." She continued, "It's just a test. You are a bright, interesting person and your life is going to turn out just fine, regardless of this exam. Try to remember that."

Heeding the advice of his tutor and believing in the methodology he had learned through Test Prep Gurus, Anthony powered through the official exam and hoped for the best. About three weeks later, Anthony received a message from Test Prep Gurus informing him that his scores were available online. With his friends gathering around his phone, Anthony jumped online to look at his scores.

He couldn't believe what he saw.

2250! The score placed Anthony well above the 99th percentile nationally. He had improved 290 points, a sizeable improvement for anyone, but especially impressive given Anthony's initially strong starting score. He had scored 11 out of 12 on his essay, broke 700 on the math portion for the first time, and scored a perfect 800 on the Critical Reading.

With his friends celebrating alongside him, Anthony called both his parents. When Anthony's father heard the news, he couldn't help but release a thrilled outburst on the sales floor of his workplace, gushing with pride and unable to contain his excitement.

Anthony will be the first of his generation in his immediate family to attend college. Thanks in part to the trail that he is blazing, Anthony's younger sisters are following in his footsteps, taking steps to realize their own aspirations for college. Anthony is excited to explore a variety of academic disciplines in college. He doesn't want to commit to a major before exploring all possibilities: "I'm more concerned about college as an experience and learning what I want to learn because, at this point, I've realized that I've proven to myself that I'm capable of figuring it out."

Anthony hasn't yet decided which school he wants to attend, but he will surely have plenty of outstanding options to find the right fit for him. His list of potential schools includes Boston College, Tufts, Georgetown, and Yale. We'll find out soon exactly where he'll be admitted, but as of right now, all doors are open!

Anthony Palacio Score Summary:

Official Exam: 2250

National Ranking: **99th Percentile**

Critical Reading: 800

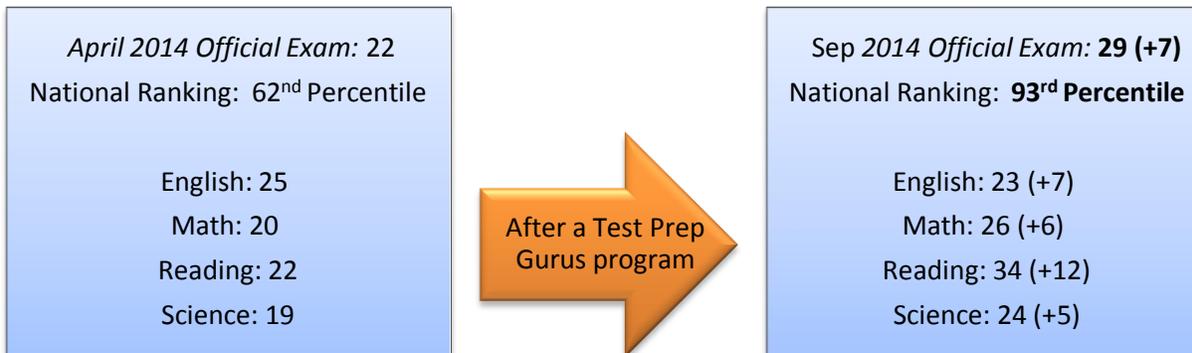
Math: 700

Writing: 740

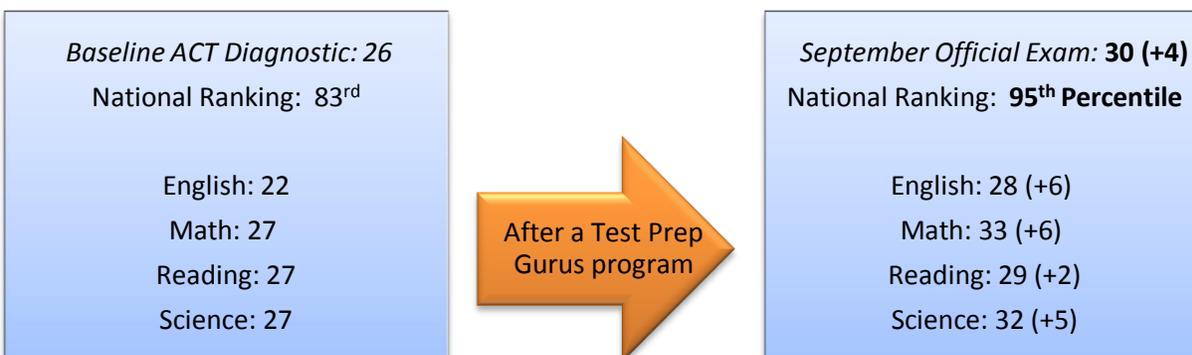
Essay: 11

Other 2014 Test Prep Gurus Scholarship Results:

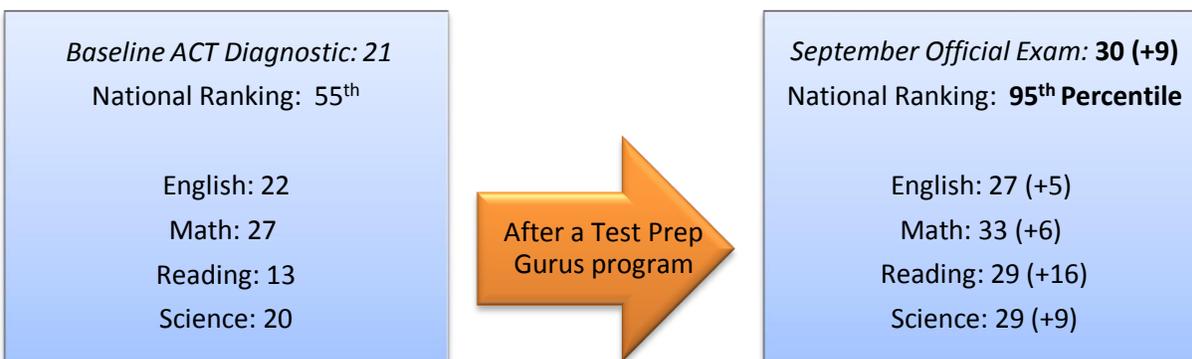
Westridge School for Girls, Senior:



Sage Hill School, Senior:



The Webb Schools, Senior:



Test Prep Gurus specializes in customized 1-on-1 ACT and SAT tutoring for students of all abilities. Our unique teaching methodology is rooted in positive psychology, personal development, growth mindset, and achieving success however the student defines it. We believe the consistent superior score increases achieved by our students are a consequence of this unique approach.

Last year:

- *We helped the Webb Schools to rank in the top 25 boarding schools in the country for highest average SAT scores.*
- *Our students averaged improvement of 320-440 points on the SAT and 4-6 points on the ACT.*
- *One in three of our ACT students improved 6-8 composite points (an improvement of this magnitude propels a typical student's national ranking up into the top 10 percent of the country.)*
- *Students that completed our 'Ivy Aspirations' program typically achieved scores in the 99th percentile nationally.*



If you have a goal **Test Prep Gurus** can help you reach it.

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