



The College Spy® Podcast with Michelle McAnaney

#15 Digital SAT Surprises & Tips: The College Spy's interview with SAT & ACT Tutor, Heather Krey

Welcome to The College Spy podcast, a podcast for parents and students addressing all aspects of the college selection and admissions process. I'm Michelle McAnaney, the founder of The College Spy. We offer college planning services to students and families across the United States and internationally. We are a team of dedicated educators who are committed to helping students and families identify the right colleges to apply to and get accepted. We offer our guidance and expertise in a way that improves student performance, increases confidence and promotes college readiness and maturity. The College Spy works with all students including students interested in the STEM fields, students with learning differences, international students, and third culture kids. To learn more about The College Spy, visit our website at TheCollegeSpy.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Welcome to this week's episode. In this episode, I speak with Heather Krey of World Class Tutoring about the first administration of the digital SAT in the United States. You'll also hear The College Spy's tip of the day, and we have a college spotlight on Champlain College. Heather Krey is the co-owner of World Class Tutoring. She has more than two decades of experience helping students meet their goals on the SAT and ACT, and is the author of World Class Tutoring's Innovative Test Prep Curriculum. Heather has bachelor's degrees from Lehigh University, in Engineering and Psychology. She also has a Master's of Education in Mathematics from DeSales University and a Master's of Education in Teaching from Kutztown University. Heather holds Pennsylvania teaching certificates in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and English and has taught at high schools in Pennsylvania. She also worked as an adjunct professor at Cedar Crest College and as a tutor at Kutztown's University Writing Center. Before world class tutoring, she and her team ran Test Prep for Success, a tutoring and test prep business similar to World Class Tutoring.

Michelle McAnaney:

Welcome to The College Spy podcast. I'm so glad to have you.

Heather Krey:

Thanks, Michelle. I'm so happy to be here.

Michelle McAnaney:

Tell us a little bit about your background and World Class Tutoring.



Heather Krey:

Thanks for asking, Michelle. I am a professional SAT and ACT tutor. That's what I do full time. And I started actually as an engineer, which is an interesting background, but surprisingly there's quite a few people in my area that did not start as SAT tutors and eventually ended there through a different path. So mine was first an engineer, and then second, a math teacher at a high school. And finally, when I started having kids and realized that full time math teacher job didn't work well with my family situation, SAT prep was the perfect place for me. So that's what I've been doing, but I do bring a lot of background from the industry and from teaching into the test prep profession.

Michelle McAnaney:

And your business is World Class Tutoring.

Heather Krey:

It is. It's new because I have a new business partner and we took our current businesses, which both had been in existence for several years, and we married them. And now we have a brand new company called WorldClassTutoring.com. It's easy to find on the internet. And we do mostly SAT and ACT, but also we'll do math, straight up help you with your math class or your chemistry or physics class.

Michelle McAnaney:

And I want to let everybody know that Heather is the person that when people come to me and ask who should they go to for SAT prep or ACT prep, I'm like, call Heather Krey. She has been very helpful to lots of College Spy's students.

Heather Krey:

We love the College Spy students Michelle. You send us our smartest ones, I think.

Michelle McAnaney:

The kindest ones, too. So we're going to talk today about the digital SAT and how what the students were prepping for was a little bit different from what they experienced when they took the test in March. I think before we get to that, it might be helpful to the audience to hear about the digital SAT and how it changed from the old SAT.

Heather Krey:

It's a great question because parents and people who took the SAT back in the 90s, I'm not sure when you took it. I took it in the 1990s and it has changed so much since then. And if you're not in the business, why would you notice that? And so a lot of the parents of my students really don't realize how different it is compared to when they took it. So, back then it was on paper, now it is completely on the computer. Back then it was three hours long, now it's only two, so



that's a nice change. At some point you had to read a whole page and then answer like ten questions all on the same page of text. So, the questions were grouped by passage. There are no longer long passages on the SAT. Now, every question is a once and done, so although the reading is very challenging, it is in short paragraphs. It's no longer in long passages, and students really prefer that. Those passages were hard to keep everything straight, and you spent a lot of time looking for a detail. You don't have that hide and seek anymore. Now, the information is all there, but it's still very high level. The vocabulary is, well there's another change. The vocabulary has gotten harder, not easier. On the math side, one big change that happened when the test went digital is that they integrated a digital graphing calculator into the platform called Desmos. You can bring your own calculator, but this Desmos is much more powerful than the, even the \$100 calculators that you can buy that can graph. The Desmos is much better than that. And so I've been spending a lot of time with my students teaching them the skills on that graphing calculator because it usually bumps your score up about 100 points to really learn how to master those functions.

Michelle McAnaney:

That's interesting.

Heather Krey:

It's a good change. It's we're entering the age of technology, right? So that's part of what we're learning.

Michelle McAnaney:

The kids aren't learning how to use Desmos at school, are they?

Heather Krey:

It totally depends. There are some students whose teachers like it and have used it in the classroom and so they're very familiar with it, but I've also had students who have never heard of it. Once they meet me, then they've heard of it. That's one of the first things we do, is make sure they can use it.

Michelle McAnaney:

A big change with the digital SAT is this adaptive test.

Heather Krey:

Absolutely. That is why it's an hour shorter, because if they find out that you're a high level student, the test stops bothering asking you the easy questions, and if they find out that you are not ready for those super high level questions, they don't ask them anymore, and they focus on the easy questions, so they can get to your level. They can pinpoint it with fewer questions by being adaptive. It's in four modules. The first module is medium level reading,



writing, and then depending on how you do, you get either the easy or the hard module too. And there is a big difference between easy and hard. It is not adapted by question though. So it's just that one decision point, easy or hard module. And then you take the whole module together. And then the same thing repeats with math. So that you have your first module math, everybody gets the same thing. It's about the medium level. And then the computer makes a decision after you finish that module. Do you get the easy or the hard version of Module 2 math?

Michelle McAnaney:

Is Module 1 much shorter than Module 2? Or is it an equal number of questions?

Heather Krey:

It's an equal number of questions, same amount of time, but that's deceiving. Because if you get Module 2, the hard version, every question is harder. So every question takes longer. So even though it's the same number of questions, you're going to struggle to finish on time in Module 2 when you didn't have to struggle in Module 1. And we're learning as we go because the practice materials were easier than the test that was given this past March. And so a lot of the strategies now have to be tweaked that the test has evolved a little bit.

Michelle McAnaney:

The SAT that the students took in March was the digital SAT, and it was the first time it was offered, right?

Heather Krey:

Well, you know what, even that's a little bit more complicated. It's the first time it was offered in the United States. So I actually had a handful of students myself, five or six students in India, and the Dominican Republic, and Syria who took the digital SAT a year earlier than the U.S. students were able to access it. That was actually good for me because it did happen that the test that they got for real was harder than the practice materials. So while I wasn't shocked when it happened in the U.S., I wasn't sure it was going to happen, but I wasn't surprised because it did already happen on the international stage.

Michelle McAnaney:

So the students were given practice materials. They were given four exams to practice from, but these were not real SATs. They were just practice tests that the College Board put out. And then the actual test that the students in the U.S. took in March was much harder. Can you describe how it was harder?



Heather Krey:

I guess I don't want to overestimate that it was much harder. I guess to somebody who's really entrenched in the specific questions, to me it's a big deal. It was a good step harder than the practice test, but it wasn't so different that it was completely unfair or something. It was just, you could tell there was a big difference.

Michelle McAnaney:

Sure. And especially for a student who spent a lot of time on test prep, they are definitely going to be able to tell. I had students come out of that test and say to me, Oh, it was really hard. I did terrible on it. Their score was lower than how they were doing on their practice test. So they were disappointed.

Heather Krey:

That happened to students at the highest echelon. So if you were getting a 1400 or a 1500 in your practice tests, chances are on the real test, your score was a little lower. I did not see that effect though. If you were getting 1200 on your practice tests, you were probably getting a 1200 on the official as well. So it didn't affect all students equally. It's certainly the ones in that upper highest level who felt it the most. If you were a student who got the easier versions of module two, it was not any different from the practice test. So, we are also only talking about a certain slice of our students.

Michelle McAnaney:

So what were the differences?

Heather Krey:

Well, there's a good question. I think the module 2 card is the only place where there was a big difference. And so only the students who earned that hard module two felt it. But on the reading, the questions took more time, and the vocabulary was pumped up even compared to the four practice tests that students had pre access to. So it was a level more difficult than they expected. And what that meant was that students who took all four practice tests and never ran out of time, suddenly ran out of time on the real test in the module two. And so it changed the pacing more than anything else. And then the same thing happened in math. Module 1 was exactly as expected, but if you earned yourself the hard module 2, instead of having two super hard questions, there were more like five or six super hard questions. And when I say super hard, that's what I've been calling the just a handful of questions on the SAT that stand out as something you cannot do in 30 seconds. You really have to put a whole two minutes in, even if you know exactly how to do it. And there's a few of those. What that meant was students ran out of time when they had never done so on the practice test. So now we have to start talking about the fastest way to do the questions, not just the most accurate way, because speed is really a much bigger part of it than we expected.



Michelle McAnaney:

And I would imagine that as these students who are, they're good students expecting to get a high score on the SAT as they were going through that module two and noticing that they were running out of time, and they weren't working as quickly, I would imagine that they started to feel anxious, and that could affect their score as well.

Heather Krey:

Oh, it always will, and you're right, when you get something that you don't expect. If you have any anxiety, it's just going to be exacerbated from the surprise of that. I completely agree, and watching that clock tick, and you are not nearly far enough along in the test is going to make that worse. It's a great point, Michelle.

Michelle McAnaney:

Yeah, especially since those are the kids who probably practiced all four tests and actually did time themselves to make sure they were working within the time limits and then got something different. What are your specific recommendations for students who are going to be taking this exam in May? What recommendations do you have for the students?

Heather Krey:

Oh, that's a great question. For the reading and writing, well, first of all, here's some great news. The College Board leased two new practice tests on their Bluebook app five and six. They came out about a week after the March SAT and they are much closer in difficulty to the March SAT. I've had plenty of students try them and say, yes, this is just like the test that I took in March. So, My first thing is start with test five and six, because now you're going to get an accurate picture of exactly what the SAT is going to feel like. Certainly you can use tests one through four as great practice, but keep in mind they're not quite as hard. Or at least they have fewer super hard questions and more of the easy and medium. So the difficulty doesn't go higher than the super hard questions. It's just, there's so many more of them. So my first thing is start with test five and six. My second thing is, if you get the hard module of the reading and writing section, I have found most students are doing better if they skip the questions in the middle because the questions do follow a predictable pattern of question types. The first type of question is just fill in the blank. They're called sentence completions, and they're pretty quick. The answer choices are one word each. It's a high level vocabulary, but it doesn't take a long time. The questions in the middle have a long paragraph, a lot of logic. You have to read the whole thing. There might be a graph and those ones take a really long time because there's a lot of information to go with it. And that really slows you down. And then you get past the halfway point, and you get these grammar questions. Do you put a comma here or a semicolon? They can be hard questions, but we're back to fast. And then after those grammar questions, you get transition words. Should we put a however, for example, or otherwise into



this blank? Again, one word answers, and so they're going to be much faster. And the last couple of questions, they're called the rhetorical synthesis. They have a bunch of bullet points and then they have a question and we have found that it is not necessary to read the bullet points. So make sure you know you can speed up on those. Those are also fast questions. So the best strategy we're finding is to do all the fast ones first and to save the ones that are going to slow you down for the end. That way, it's the anxiety you were talking about, Michelle, you don't have to worry about "Oh, there's still 20 questions I haven't answered yet. I only have so many minutes left." Now you know you've done all of those quick and easy questions, and you can spend all of your remaining time on those like 10 in the middle that are really going to slow you down. I still think you should do all of them, but saving them for the last is the best strategy.

Michelle McAnaney:

What tips do you have for the math section?

Heather Krey:

Well, first of all, I already talked about Desmos, and that is by far the most important tip, is to get creative. You can solve any question, any equation on Desmos, and I know it's a graphing tool. And my students are like, "but Heather, I don't have to graph this equation." Like, but if you do, you're going to solve it a lot faster than if you solve it with your regular calculator or paper. So we learned how to do a lot of questions that are not graphing, but we still do them on Desmos. Another part of it though is now there's a lot of questions that are very much solvable on Desmos, but it takes a little bit longer because you have to type in the equation and there might be a great shortcut if you really understand the math deeply and you might be able to do it in half the time just by using your paper then if you had to type it in. So we're also practicing. Okay, now you know how to do it on Desmos. Is that the best way for this question or is there an even faster way for this question? And that's where we start taking it question by question and I'm really strategizing the best way for each one

Michelle McAnaney:

Do you think that students are going to switch to the ACT after their experience taking the March SAT?

Heather Krey:

I'm so glad we're talking about this because this is nowhere out of the weeds a little bit and it is a big decision. Every student gets to pick, SAT or ACT? Which one do you like better? There's pros and cons. I'm not sure what students are going to do. But I will say that because the SAT is now two hours and the ACT is still three hours, well, I don't know about you, but I'd rather take a two hour test.



Some of my students would agree there. And every practice test that you take is only two hours instead of three hours. So it's not just a one hour difference. If you think about your studying for it over and over again, every time you take a practice test it is an hour shorter. And that does make a difference. The ACT has those reading passages that really wear you down and it's not that they're high difficulty, but they're exhausting to read that passage and to find all the details that are hiding in there. And so students do prefer the short reading questions, even though they're high difficulty compared to the long passages. That's another plus for SAT. The SAT has Desmos and the ACT usually does not. And so I used to say, if you're better at math, the SAT is a little better because that's 50 percent math. If math is your weaker point, then the ACT is only 25 percent math. So then I would usually aim people toward the ACT if we know that the math is going to be bringing their score down. The one thing that I always send people to the ACT for is if they have extended time. If they have that accommodation, you can get extended time on both tests, but it's a bigger advantage on the ACT because timing is much tighter on the ACT. So if you get extra, it helps you more. So that's the no brainer part if you're taking it with time and a half, go ACT.

Michelle McAnaney:

It's very difficult for people to figure out on their own without working with someone like you who can talk to a student and then analyze their work and make a good suggestion of which test to take and how to approach the practicing.

Heather Krey:

I'm not sure I've mentioned this to you before, but I do have a program called Mindprint. It's a one hour, it's not a test like the SAT, but it's a test that you take online, and it's almost like an online game. And what it looks like is Space Invaders, think 90s graphics though, don't think about the Nintendo. But you take this game and it tests your abilities, like your focus, your attention, your verbal versus mathematical logical skills, something called flexible thinking, which is very important. And then at the end, it looks sort of like the speedometer of your car. On one side it says ACT, on the other it says SAT, and then there's this arm. It could be pointing at one, or the other, or somewhere in between. And that can really help you decide which test is better for you. A lot of my students really enjoy taking that test, and then the mystery is taken out of it.

Michelle McAnaney:

Mindprint, is that something people can find online or is it something that you have for your students?

Heather Krey:

Yeah, we have an account with the Mindprint so we can give it to our students.



Michelle McAnaney:

I see.

Heather Krey:

I think you do have to work through a professional, it's not something that you can take on your own, but you can get in touch with us and I'll just send you some more information on that, Michelle, if you want to use it with your students. My most ambitious students take them both. And then all the mystery is out after you get your scores, then you decide which ones do you send to colleges. I don't know if that's an easy thing to do, but it's an easy decision because now you can see the scores and send the better ones.

Michelle McAnaney:

Sure, and it depends on the kid whether that's easy. Some kids, that's just perfectly logical and they're going to do both and they want to have the best score possible to send to schools. And other kids are prioritizing, but really not like to take more exams.

Heather Krey: Well, who wants to take more exams? That's totally fair. And the SAT and ACT have diverged now. It used to be you could study for them both simultaneously because they were so similar. And now that's true, but to less of an extent than it used to be. So I would say you have more study time if you want to take both. Whereas it used to be, it was about the same amount of study time because it was the same topics on each.

Michelle McAnaney:

Tell us about World Class Tutoring. How can people get in touch with you if they're interested in learning about your services?

Heather Krey:

Thank you so much for asking Michelle. We probably have spent 80 percent of our time one on one tutoring. It is all private and every session is based completely on the needs and the strengths and weaknesses of the student we're working with. It's all online, so it is wonderful that I live in Pennsylvania, but I have students in Texas, and Florida, and Madrid, and Dominican Republic, and it's amazing, it really is world class, we picked that word world because we are tutoring the whole world. So most of the tutoring is one on one. However, on Saturdays and Sundays, we do offer a group class, and that can be financially easier for a lot of our students, and that's one reason it's important to us to have that ability to give something that's at a lower price point. Still, they're small groups. If I know who's coming, I plan those sessions still to personalize it if I know somebody really has to work on geometry. Well, this class is going to work on geometry today. So we still keep it like a family atmosphere. But on Saturdays and Sundays we have our SAT and ACT group classes. You can learn about these by going to WorldClassTutoring.com, and those classes are called the membership. So you don't sign up for



them one at a time. You just get the membership and then you are welcome to come to all of them for four months.

Michelle McAnaney:

Thank you so much for coming on The College Spy podcast.

Heather Krey:

Oh, thank you so much for having me, Michelle. I always love working together with your College Spy students.

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The College Spy's Tip of the Day:

If your college acceptance letter came with a merit scholarship, find out two things. First, ask if the scholarship is renewable every year. And second, find out what GPA is required each semester to keep the scholarship.

Today's College Spotlight is on Champlain College. Champlain College is a small college widely known for its focus on career readiness, interdisciplinary curriculum, and hands on approach to learning. Champlain is in Burlington, Vermont, a small city located on Lake Champlain. Burlington is regarded as one of the most thriving college towns in the country. Approximately one quarter of the city's residents are college students and there is always something to do.

Champlain's upside down curriculum blends general education and professional courses, allowing first year students to dive right in and begin taking classes in their field of study. The core curriculum is the college's version of a Gen Ed liberal arts required curriculum. Over four years, students work to improve their critical thinking and collaborative skills by engaging in discussions, projects, and experiential learning. Year one students are focused on transitioning to life as a new college student. All students are required to participate in the Insight program. The goal of this program is to ensure career and professional success after graduation. There are three tracks, well-being, personal finance, and career positioning. Students are encouraged to participate in an internship of some kind, and Champlain has satellite campuses in Dublin and Montreal.



Of the approximately 1,800 undergraduates, 64% are male and 30% are students of color. The school has a 65% acceptance rate and is test optional. Not surprisingly, classes are small, and 85% have less than 20 students. The most popular majors are Game Design, Business Information Tech, Computer Networking and Cybersecurity, and Computer Science. All first year students live in one of 21 restored Victorian mansions that surround campus. Approximately 72% of all students stay on campus for four years. There are modern traditional residence hall options as well. There is one campus dining hall, where there is an emphasis on local and healthy foods and sustainable practices. Champlain students describe their fellow students as geeks and gamers. The only varsity sports team is an E sports team. However, about a third of all students participate in various intramural sports, ranging from hockey and rugby to dodgeball, and snowboarding. There are about 50 student clubs and organizations focused on academics, entertainment and the arts, and other interests.

On the weekends, students venture into Burlington, taking advantage of the local food and culture scene. There are countless opportunities for outdoor adventures like hiking, mountain biking, boating, and skiing or snowboarding. Students looking for a more vibrant party scene offer venture to nearby UVM, or the University of Vermont.

Interesting facts about Champlain College:

- The school's mascot is Chauncey the Beaver.
- Champlain was founded in 1878, and it is one of the first colleges in Vermont to offer competitive gaming on a varsity level.

The College Spy interviewed a current Champlain student to get insider information. Here's what she told us.

What is the best place on campus to hang out with friends or meet new people?

Dorm common rooms are where me and my friends hang out. Clubs are the best place to meet new people.

What is the best food or meal in the dining hall?

Occasionally they serve steak.

Describe a typical student at your school?

Nerdy.

What do most students do on weekends to have fun?

We really hang out with friends.



What is the best dorm to live in as a freshman?

McDonald Hall.

And if you could wave a magic wand, what would you change about your college?

Make the food better.

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