

Tuesday, August 21, 1984

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## *Federal Money and Student Test Scores*

Raymond English of the Ethics and Public Policy Center [letter, Aug. 12] suggests that SAT scores have stopped declining because block grants to states have reduced "federal interference" in state and local matters. As an education researcher, I think this is a debatable hypothesis. Consider some facts.

First, the SAT decline stopped in 1981, two school years before the state block grants went into effect. Further, there is no evidence that the decline prior to 1981 was related to categorical programs.

That decline is generally attributed to factors such as increased numbers of students taking the test, curriculum changes, television and changes in family structure.

Second, block grants cannot be expected to make a difference in SAT scores because they represent a minor percentage of funds spent on education. They account for only 6 percent of all federal expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools and considerably less than 1 percent of total expenditures for these schools. Indeed, even these small amounts are not targeted to skills covered by the SAT.

Although it would be helpful if SAT scores could be raised as easily as Mr. English suggests, the facts simply do not support a link between federal regulations (or their absence) and students' test-taking abilities.

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