

All of the Above

Laura Wilson of Chappaqua, founder of WilsonPrep SAT/ACT Tutoring Service

BY: LAURIE YARNELL

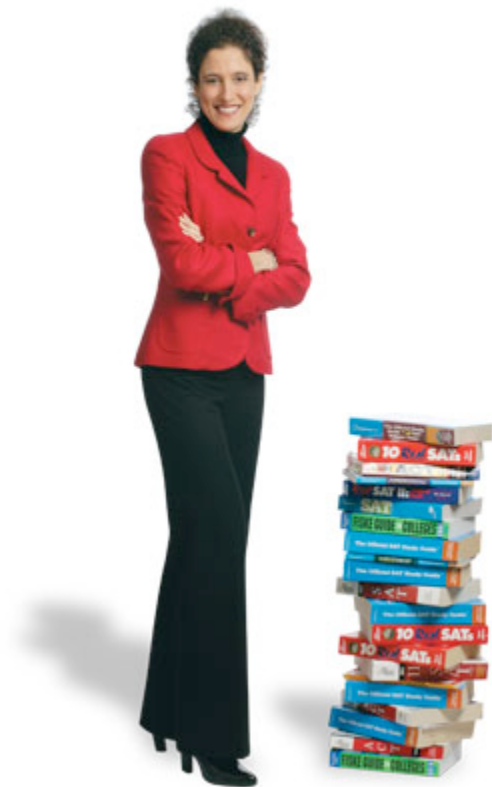


Photo by John Rizzo

How long have you been doing this?

I've been tutoring on and off for the past twenty years. I started out teaching English at Bronx High School of Science, then Scarsdale High, and finally at Horace Greeley High School. After my second child was born, I just couldn't go back. I started WilsonPrep in 2001 and today I employ ten tutors.

When do you recommend that students start test prep?

I have many parents who want to start their children's test prep in tenth grade, but I would not recommend being tutored until junior year. At a certain point, it's just overkill, and you can get burned out. Most kids begin in September of junior year and end in March, May, or June, depending on test dates. But I have no problem with kids—depending upon what kind of students they are—beginning in January for a March or May test.

Share one of your test-prep strategies

with us.

One of our key strategies is studying in short sound bites—a little every day, say for vocab, five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the afternoon. In fact, I have my kids keep a box in their bathroom full of index cards with vocab words on them just for that purpose. When I do my bathroom checks—I stop by all my

students' homes unannounced—eighty percent of them have their shoeboxes behind the toilet.

How much do you charge for your services?

An hour of private tutoring costs one-hundred seventy-five dollars; most kids come twice a week, once for verbal and once for math. I also offer a small group of no more than seven students. Each one-hour session is fifty to ninety dollars per student. My online tutoring service, WilsonDailyPrep, is less expensive.

How old are your children and where are they on the college-prep timeline?

My two boys, ages eight and ten, hopefully want to go to either Michigan, where I went and met my husband, or Dartmouth, near which we have a house. About every two months, I drive them through the Dartmouth campus telling them how proud I'd be if they went there—and promising to do their laundry if they do.

Were you prepped for your own SATs?

I took a Kaplan course and remember not doing the homework. And I remember my mother, an English teacher herself, sending me to my room and telling me to study vocab words. I would read romance novels instead.

So, what did you get?

I got a six hundred sixty in verbal in 1983, and I'd rather not say the math score because I am not a math tutor—I tutor English and have a master's in curriculum and teaching. If I took the tests now, I would get an eight-hundred on verbal. I am not any smarter; it's just that now I understand the test.

What's the average amount of points your students' test scores increase?

Two hundred fifty after three months of tutoring.

What was the biggest jump you've seen?

Four hundred fifty points. The student applied every strategy we taught him.

What's the most challenging part of your job?

Dealing with the helicopter mom. I get calls every single week telling me what should be covered and questioning the game plan; it can make the child crazy.

More than eight hundred schools do not require SAT scores now. Is there a future for the test?

There is always going to be a standardized test. There has to be a way to rank students.

What would you say is the most pervasive myth surrounding the SATs?

That going to the most elite school ensures lifelong happiness.