I'll be honest. I don't like talking about SAT or ACT test scores. Most admission counselors don't like talking about test scores. But most students, and especially most parents, only want to talk about test scores. In some of your countries, testing is the most important piece of your application. In the U.S., test scores are important, but they are never the most important piece of your application. As with all pieces, how much value a school puts on test scores, will depend on the school. For example, many large schools and many highly selective schools, will place great importance on test scores because, they need a quick way to navigate through the thousands and thousands of applications that they receive. On the other hand, there is currently a movement in the U.S. for schools to become, what's called, test optional, meaning students are not required to submit SAT or ACT scores to gain admission. Hundreds of schools, including many highly ranked and highly selective schools, have chosen to make their admission test-optional for all students. You can actually see a list of those schools at the website fairtest.org. As an international student, many schools that require the SAT or ACT for U.S. students, will not require you to submit SAT or ACT scores. Unfortunately, there is no way that I know of, to search for those schools specifically. It's something that you're going to have to search for, as you do your individual school-by-school research on schools that interest you. For schools that do require you to submit test scores, the tests are the great equalizer. Everyone, no matter who you are or where you are from, will take the same test. This gives the university the ability to compare students using the same measurement tool. There is no way, to truly compare educational systems or grades. But the SAT that you take, is the same SAT that I take. The ACT that you take, is the same ACT that I take. Except for the minor detail that English is my native language, but don't worry. Universities understand that you're taking these tests sometimes, as an English language learner. First, remember that when you're submitting your scores, you must have your scores sent directly from the testing agency, to the university. That makes your scores official. For most schools, scores that do not come directly from the testing agency, will not be accepted as an official piece of your application, so be very careful and remember to always have your scores sent by the testing agency. When a college or university looks at your test scores, they're looking to see how well you did. Meaning, they're primarily looking at your highest scores. In many cases, they won't even look at your low scores. This goes for the highest combined score for the SAT, or the highest composite score for the ACT, as well as, the section scores that make up your total test scores. When we talk about section scores, there are three sections of the SAT, Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. The ACT has five sections, English, Math, Reading, Science, and Writing. With the ACT, you'll see the Writing listed as an optional section. But most U.S. universities will require you, to take that section of the test. All schools have a range of scores that they look for to fulfill their requirements. These score ranges vary widely by university. Score ranges can even vary, depending on the program that you're applying to. For instance, an engineering applicant will often see higher math score ranges, than English score ranges. If an admission officer looks at your total scores and section scores, and sees that, sees that your scores are comfortably in the range that the school and, or major requires then often, they are finished with your test scores. It's just that simple. They have score requirements. You meet the score requirements. Onto the next piece of the application. If you do not meet the requirements, or if you are below the comfortable range for admission, then the admission counselor, is likely to look deeper into your scores. Again, trends can be important. Are your scores increasing, or decreasing? How many times have you
taken the test? Are your lower scores the product of one exam sitting, or several exam sittings? How are your section scores changing, compared to each other? Are your math scores increasing, but your English scores decreasing? Are they both increasing, but maybe not at the same rate? Are you planning on taking the test again in the future? Now, that last one is important. If the admission officer has a choice between denying you and waiting for future scores, they will often choose to wait for future scores. However, you must indicate future test dates on your application, or else they don’t know to expect more scores to be sent in as part of your application. As always, you have to look at your test scores the way an admission officer would. Do scores that fall below a requirement, mean that you will definitely be denied? No, but it does mean that your chances of admission are lower. Depending on how much importance the school places on test scores. A very important consideration for testing, is how tests will work in your application plan. First, you will need decide which test you are going to take. Schools rarely have a preference between the SAT and the ACT, which means, both options are available to you. Both tests measure similar abilities, but the tests are definitely not the same. The ACT website, actually does a great job describing the differences between the tests. They say, the ACT is an achievement test, measuring what a student has learned in school. The SAT, is more of an aptitude test, testing reasoning and verbal abilities. What this means, is that the style of questions is going to be different for each of the tests. They also say, the ACT has up to five components: English, Math, Reading, Science, and an optional Writing test. The SAT has only three components: Critical Reading, Mathematics, and a required Writing test. Again, the big difference here is that the ACT has a science section, which the SAT does not. They also say, the SAT has a correction for guessing, that is, they take off for wrong answers. The ACT is scored, based on the number of correct answers, with no penalty for guessing. This means, that there are differences in testing strategy and how you actually take each of the tests. Many of the students we work with at the ELP, try taking both tests. And that’s something that I would recommend you consider doing. From the student’s perspective, the biggest differences that they talk about are that the ACT has more questions to answer, and less time to answer each questions. But the questions, are more direct. The SAT has less questions to answer, but the questions are more in-depth. As an English language learner, both tests offer unique challenges, but one might be better for you than the other. Personally, I have seen students do great on the SAT and terrible on the ACT, just like I have seen students with really high ACT scores. And not so high SAT scores. It all depends on which test clicks with your personality. The only way to know which test to take, is to take them both, particularly as practice tests. Both test organizations offer practice tests on their websites. The SAT, offers a choice of practice tests between online or paper. The ACT, only offers a paper version. If the practice tests are not enough for you to figure out which test to take, you might want to consider taking each of the real tests once. After that, I would encourage you to choose one test or the other to focus on for future testing dates. Students will tell me that they have heard that you should not take the test more than three times. There is no rule about how many times you can take the test, but this myth is really popular among students. Universities will look at the scores you submit, no matter how many times you take the test. However, there is some truth to this idea of taking less tests. Taking tests over, and over, and over, does not guarantee that your scores will increase. Both the SAT and ACT have information about retesting on their website. The ACT reports on research that shows students from the, the 2013 graduating class, who took the ACT more than once and what they report is that 57% increased their composite score on the retest. 21% had no change in their composite score on the retest. 22%
decreased their composite score on the retest. For students with an initial ACT composite score between 13 and 29, the typical ACT composite score from the second testing, is about one point higher. The lower your initial ACT composite score, the more likely your second score will be higher than the first. The higher your initial ACT composite score, the more likely that your second score will be the same, or lower than the first score. The SAT reports similar information. 55% of juniors, so a junior is someone in their third year of study, 55% of juniors taking the test improve their scores as seniors. 35% had score drops. Ten percent had no change. The higher a student scores as a junior, the more likely the student's subsequent scores will drop. The lower the initial score, the more likely the scores will go up. On average, junior's repeating the AC, the SAT as seniors, approved their combined critical reading, mathematics and writings scores, by approximately 40 points. About one in 25 gained 100 or more points on critical reading or mathematics, and about one in 90, lost 100 or more points. Consider all of this information. I know it's a lot. But think about all of that information, and think about how many times you plan to take the test. Remember, there is no guarantee that your scores are going to increase or, that your scores are going to increase significantly. One thing we haven't discussed are SAT Subject Tests. A limited number of U.S. schools, will require you to take the SAT Subject Tests. The subject tests measure your ability in a single area, a single specialized area. When it comes to scoring, they are also scored on a 800 scale, but the average scores tend to be much higher. Think about it. If you're taking a test that's only about one subject, and you are well-versed in that subject area, your scores should be higher. So when looking at your subject test scores, pay attention to the score percentile, more than the score itself. Also, be sure to note university requirements. Some schools will actually waive the subject test requirement. If you have taken the ACT instead. Think about all of this information, and take out your application calendar. On your calendar, mark dates to take each of the practice tests, then, think about how many times you might want to take the real test. Look at your deadlines, and work backwards. Remember, if you plan to take the tests early, you can always add later test dates if you need to. If you do get the scores you want, then you can just be finished taking the test earlier than you had planned. If you can, I advise that you try to take the tests earlier in your process, so that you can concentrate on other pieces, right before the application deadline. Students spend countless hours, and sometimes a lot of money, to prepare to take the SAT and ACT. When you add in the stress and anxiety the,that these tests often create, you can understand why people want to talk about them so much. My best advice for you, relax. It's only a test. [BLANK_AUDIO]