

Testing for Admission to Independent Schools

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Individually administered testing provides information that can be used by parents, students and schools to satisfactorily determine the most appropriate educational program for the student.

Parents seek an independent school to meet the needs of their child. Independent schools look for those students who will do best in their school. No two students are alike. No two independent schools are alike.

Parents look for schools, which would offer their child an appropriate academic program and educational environment. First, parents must know as much as possible about their child in order to select the most appropriate schools. Then, parents must learn about several schools and which might meet their child's educational needs.

Independent schools learn about their applicants by developing application forms, requesting educational records, grade levels completed, courses taken and grades earned in those courses, letters of recommendation from teachers who have worked with the child, a current medical report, and often require the results of current standardized testing. There are several age and grade appropriate standardized tests. Some tests are designed to be administered to groups of children; others are to be administered to just one child at a time. Some tests are intelligence tests, others are achievement tests.

It is very important that the individual student's history be considered when evaluating the results of a test. It should be noted if the student's native language is not English, if the student has been educated in another language, if

the student has been educated abroad and in what sorts of schools. The child's history may impact how that student performs on tests, which have been normed on students who have lived and been educated entirely in the English language in the United States.

Group Tests Most Commonly Required by Independent Schools

The Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) or the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE) is required for admission to many independent schools grades 5 or 6 through grades 11 or 12. Students must take these tests the academic year they are applying for admission and the test results must reach the schools prior to the application deadline. These tests are offered several times during a school year to large groups of students at specified dates and sites. Both the SSAT and the ISEE provide information booklets with registration forms, which may be obtained from the schools requiring these tests. Parents must submit the registration form and payment in advance and will receive written confirmation, which the child is to take to the test site. Both the SSAT and ISEE may be taken at their independent test centers, which are listed in their booklets. This testing has a higher cost than the regular test site fee. Appointments and registration for testing at an independent test center are made in advance directly with that test site.

The ISEE and the SSAT both have four multiple-choice sections and one writing section. Following submission of written documentation of the need, both may offer special individualized accommodations to appropriate students.

Some areas of difference between the ISEE and the SSAT are:

ISEE

SSAT

independent
test centers

special accommodation time is 1 1/2 time	special accommodation time is double time
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Individually Administered Intelligence Tests.

Applicants for lower grades may be required to have an intelligence test—which may be the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III (WISC-III). Occasionally an independent school may ask that an applicant for one of the higher grades take an individually administered intelligence, and/or achievement test to add to educational information about that student.

There are three levels of the Wechsler Intelligence tests, all of which are scored by age. These tests may be taken no more frequently than once a year (12 months). The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence - revised age range is 3 years 0 months to 7 years 3 months. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III age range is 6 years 0 months to 16 years 11 months. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III age range is 16 years 0 months through 34 years. The Wechsler test must be administered by a fully qualified professional who is authorized to purchase and administer these tests. It is administered one-on-one and may take up to two hours.

There are thirteen subtests on the WISC-III—half Verbal and half Performance administered alternating Verbal and Performance. Verbal subtests contain verbal instructions and require verbal answers. Performance subtests contain verbal instructions and require manual responses.

Intelligence quotient has evolved from a single IQ score, kept secret from children and adults, to a concept of multiple intelligences and disclosure of test results to both children and adults. No single test assesses all known areas of intelligence. Scores on the WISC-III include Verbal, Performance, and the resulting Full Scale Scores. Also, there is a score for each of the subtests. Analysis of specific groupings of subtests produces Index Scores in the following areas: Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Organization, Freedom from Distractibility, and Processing Speed.

Most students do better in some tasks than others and the scores will vary. When there is statistically significant scatter, it should be noted. A difference of 15+ points between Verbal and Performance scores is considered statistically significant. In this situation, the Full Scale Score does not describe the person and an educational program should not be developed based upon

this single score. Subtest scores should be used instead. There may be significant scatter within the Verbal subtest and within the Performance scores, as well.

The WISC-III is an intelligence test, scored by age, with achievement an important factor. There is no traditional reading or writing on the WISC-III. Therefore, there is no clear assessment of the student's achievement. For this reason, both intelligence and achievement tests are administered, often in tandem.

Individually Administered Achievement Tests

There are many achievement tests. The Woodcock-Johnson-Revised: Tests of Achievement has been one of the most popular. It may be scored by age, grade equivalent (Kindergarten through 16.4), by standard scores and percentile ranks. The wide range enables high achieving students to demonstrate achievement through the fourth year of college equivalent. The 13 WJ-R subtests assess, in some depth, several areas of reading, writing and math, and there is one section each for Humanities, Science, and Social Studies.

Grade equivalent subtest scores may be presented from highest to lowest, clearly documenting the range of achievement on this administration of the test. Again, all subtest scores are never the same. Some variation in subtest scores is expected. When there is significant scatter, specific educational interventions may be recommended. Response to very high achievement in one or more areas may be to provide more challenging curriculum in those areas to that student. Response to significant scatter may be to address the low areas without sacrificing the high areas, so that all achievement may become closer to the maximum accomplished.

Selecting a Professional to Administer These Tests

To administer the Wechslers, the professional, usually a psychologist, licensed professional counselor, or school psychologist, must be qualified to administer the test. In interviewing persons who administer the test, parents can ask questions before scheduling the appointment. Parents should ask the specific qualifications of the professional and if the tests are current. (For example, both the WPPSI and the WJ-R are now publishing new editions.) And, parents should ask at the same time for both the testing appointment and the follow-up appointment to go over the results of the testing. This needs to be done because, unfortunately, parents have been known to wait weeks or even months before getting the test results. Sometimes the results are too late to be useful for that year's school admission, and these tests may not be taken again for another 12 months.

The same professional can administer both the intelligence and the

achievement testing and write one report using information learned from both tests such as compatibility of scores, whether the student's achievement is at the level of intelligence, and if data in one supports data from the other. Some professionals administer only one of the two tests, which necessitates two appointments, two fees, and two professionals. This is just one of the decisions parents make during the school search and application process.

Uses of the Intelligence and Achievement Test Results

Why would an admission office need more than applications, transcripts, letters of recommendation and interviews? Since students may have lived in vastly different areas and may have had very different experiences and education, many schools use the results of the tests designed especially for their admission needs, which help them evaluate each applicant using the same instrument. Additional individually administered testing can provide more information about the student. Again, this information can be used by parents, students and schools to satisfactorily determine the most appropriate educational program for the student.

Individual testing may answer questions about the student's educational levels. The testing may help in designing an appropriate educational program and making placement decisions for a student whose documented achievement is found to be well above grade level, or for a student whose documentation of a learning disability may lead to specific educational programs and, perhaps, special accommodations such as extended time.

Testing, whether it be group or individual, achievement or intelligence, is but one of the areas of consideration of the student applying to a school. Everything a school requests is considered by admission offices.

There is much concern about the apparent increased stress on students and whether such tests as the ISEE, the SSAT (and later the PSAT, SATs, ACT) are the cause. The numbers of test preparation centers and books are increasing. More parents are scheduling the ISEE and the SSAT as late as possible - risking the possibility of incomplete applications at the deadline in order to offer more and more tutoring of their child for the test. Some students are scheduled for the test a year early, as practice for the testing the year it will be sent to schools. Some students, when allowed, take the test more than once in the same academic year—usually with similar results.

Test results are just a part of the child and a part of the application folder. Each test indicates how the child did on the day of that testing in that environment. Each test report, whether group or individual, can be useful to parents, students and schools in evaluating which are the most appropriate schools for that student.

ADD and ADHD

ADD and ADHD should be mentioned here separately. This article is about testing. While there are many who offer testing for ADD and ADHD, there are also many professionals who state there is no “test” for either. Seminars at the National Institutes of Health have included unanimous conclusions of the professionals involved that ADD and ADHD have different sources and should be studied separately.

Both ADD and ADHD exist. Both can be observed, the ADHD student more easily. (Observation forms to be completed by parent, teacher, and student are available.) And, both are being studied in depth. Again, no two persons either with ADD or with ADHD are alike. For example, in a testing situation, one student may be observed completing the section in a small fraction of the time allowed; perhaps consciously or unconsciously working fast because attention will wane soon. Another uses every minute because of frequent starts and stops, attention and then inattention to task, throughout the time allowed. The ADHD student may find it impossible to be quiet during testing, and some crack their knuckles, tap the pencil, read the test item aloud, get out of the chair, ask questions aloud, say he or she is finished now, etc.

ADD and ADHD are recognized and, with documentation of the need, may be offered extended time accommodations by ISEE and SSAT. One-on-one testing accommodations are recommended, if available.

Could You Use Some Help?

Parents seeking a new educational situation for their child must know their child, what the most appropriate educational environment and program is best for that child, must identify several schools, must schedule admission tests required, and may need to locate a professional who has the qualifications and ability to administer individual intelligence and/or achievement tests and provide the results in time for school admission deadlines. Parents can do it on their own. Or, they can work with an independent educational consultant. How do parents identify the most appropriate educational consultant for them?

The Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA) directory notes the services offered by each of its members. If the letter S appears after the member’s listing, that educational consultant works with children and their parents to identify the most appropriate schools which meet the criteria set by the parents— such as day or boarding school, location, curriculum, desired additional services such as transportation and extended day programs. The child is the client. The educational consultant will focus on that individual child and will evaluate the child’s educational records to date, including reports of testing or therapies, which the child has had. Then the educational consultant will begin to identify schools, which might be most appropriate.

Parents contact educational consultants and select the one who seems to meet their needs. Each educational consultant has different skills, education experience, office procedures and services. Some independent educational consultants are qualified to administer both intelligence and achievement tests. Most can make referrals should individual testing be required. IECA members meet rigorous requirements for admission to membership. Education consultants with the initial CEP after their names are Certified Educational Planners. Every five years, to maintain their certification, they must submit evidence of having earned at least 100 hours of continuing professional and educational development, and of having visited at least 75 schools/college/programs depending on the services they provide. IECA members and CEPs must also agree to abide by the association's Principles of Good Practice.

Once the parents have selected the educational consultant, a contract may be signed for the services to be provided. If the services include the education consultant contacting schools on behalf of the family and/or communicating with other professionals who have worked with the child, the parents must first give signed permission to do so. There is much communication between parents and educational consultants throughout the process of the school search and application. The parents will decide to which schools they will apply, the schools decide what students they accept, and parents and child decide which school the child will attend.

Summary

In summary, testing is a routine part of school. The ISEE and the SSAT tests are a routine part of the application process for admission to independent schools. This may be a new experience for parents and students, but information and help are available. The ISEE and SSAT registration booklets contain detailed information about and descriptions of the tests, the locations and dates of the tests, their independent test centers, procedures for documenting the need for special accommodations, etc. If individual intelligence and/or achievement testing is required, schools may possibly provide the names of appropriate professionals who administer those tests. If parents want an experienced professional to help in their school search and application process, qualified independent educational consultants are available to work with them and their child. The Independent Educational Consultants Asso., founded in 1976, is a non-profit professional association. Visit their web site at www.IECAonline.com (or call 703-591-4850). Parents can ask questions all along the way and make informed decisions throughout the process.

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