



**The Stress-Free Guide  
to the  
ISEE      HSPT      SSAT**

An Introduction to  
Junior High and High School Admissions Tests

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## What admissions tests do private schools give?

There are several tests available for junior high and high schools to choose from. In the Los Angeles area, many schools use the ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam). Several area Catholic high schools use the HSPT (High School Placement Test). Elsewhere in California, the SSAT (Secondary School Admissions Test) is common. Other schools use their own material, and some don't require testing at all.

## What are these admissions tests all about?

The theory behind standardized admissions testing is fairly simple. Schools want to level the playing field. Since educational and grading standards can vary widely, standardized testing allows schools to compare students from different backgrounds with respect to a few basic skills.

Standardized testing also makes the admissions process easier for schools. Instead of spending lots of time and resources actually getting to know each individual applicant, they can rely on a quantitative measuring stick: test scores.

## What do these tests measure?

We believe that, primarily, the ISEE, HSPT and SSAT test how well you take the ISEE, HSPT and SSAT. Performance on these tests is **not** an indication of education, intelligence or worth. These tests are simply obstacles for students who want to attend certain private schools.

## Which test(s) do you need to take?

The only way to definitively determine which test a school requires or prefers is to find out from the school itself. We have included lists of some schools that require or recommend the ISEE, HSPT or SSAT. While we try to keep these lists as current and complete as possible, don't use them as your only resource. Contact the schools directly.

## A culture of testing

Whether we agree or disagree with the idea of standardized, multiple-choice testing, we live in a culture of testing. The current focus on "accountability" in education has put even more emphasis on standardized tests. By the time students leave college, they will have taken many of the following standardized tests: CTBSs, ISEEs, HSPTs, SSATs, Stanford Tests, Iowa Tests, CATs, PSATs, SAT Is and IIs, ACTs, APs, GREs, GMATs, LSATs or MCATs. And this is not an exhaustive list.

So, in light of this culture of testing, it is important for students to learn how to take standardized tests. While each test offers unique challenges, there are significant similarities in content, structure and methodology, and the student who can avoid the common pitfalls will do significantly better. In other words, learning techniques for attacking one test often translates to other tests as well.

Now let's take a look at the specific tests:

# Get to know the ISEE

The ISEE, or Independent School Entrance Examination, is used by many private schools in the Los Angeles area. The ISEE is given by the Educational Records Bureau (ERB), and the test is sometimes referred to as the ERB test.

The ERB can be reached by phone at **(800) 446-0320**, or you can visit their website at **[www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org)**.

There are three levels of the ISEE:

The **Lower Level** test is for students currently in grades 4 and 5 who are applying for admission to grades 5 and 6.

The **Middle Level** test is for students currently in grades 6 and 7 who are applying for admission to grades 7 and 8.

The **Upper Level** test is for students currently in grades 8 through 11 who are applying for admission to grades 9 through 12.

## What does the ISEE test?

The ISEE has a 30-minute essay section and four multiple-choice sections. The essay section asks the student to respond to a topic statement, but is not graded. Instead, the student's essay is sent to schools along with his or her scores so the schools can assess students' writing abilities. The sections break down as follows:

Section *	Questions	Content	Time Limit
Verbal Reasoning	40	20 synonyms and 20 sentence completions.	20 minutes (lower level:25)
Quantitative Reasoning	35	Applying arithmetic, elementary algebra, and basic geometry to interpreting data, solving non-routine problems, recognizing patterns, and estimating. Approximately 20 are regular multiple-choice and 15 are quantitative comparison questions.	35 minutes
Reading Comprehension	40 (lower level:36)	General and specific questions on 7-9 short passages of varying styles on a range of topics.	40 minutes

Section *	Questions	Content	Time Limit
Mathematics Achievement	45 (lower level:35)	Mathematics concepts students should have learned in school. All questions are regular multiple-choice.	40 minutes
Essay	1	A short response to a range of topics designed to show writing ability. Not scored, but sent to schools.	30 minutes

\* The sections may appear in a different order.

Total test time: approximately 3 hours

Total questions: 160

## How is the ISEE scored?

ISEE scores are reported for each student on a scale of 800 to 950. Scores from the Lower, Middle, and Upper Level exams cannot be compared. Before calculating a student's scaled score, the ERB first calculates a raw score. The raw score is simply computed by adding up all of a student's correct answers. **(Because there is no penalty for wrong answers, it is extremely important that you never leave an ISEE question blank. Guess on all ISEE questions!)** The ERB converts raw scores to scaled scores using a standard deviation, normal distribution curve.

## When do you take the ISEE?

The ISEE dates vary by location. The free ISEE Student Guide, available by download from the ERB website: [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org), has lists of ERB member schools and ISEE test dates. **PLEASE NOTE: You may only take the ISEE *once* in any 6-month period!**

## How do you register for the ISEE?

The ISEE allows for registration by mail, phone, fax or online (an extra fee is charged for phone and fax registrations). Registration forms are available in the free ISEE Student Guide, or you can call (800) 446-0320. Regular registration typically ends about 3 weeks before the test date. Late registration (additional fee applicable) ends about 2 weeks before the test date. Students may also be able to register late or even take the test as a walk-in for an additional fee.

Your registration fee includes sending ISEE score reports to your choice of up to 6 ERB member schools. They charge \$15 for each additional 6 scores.

## What official practice materials are available for the ISEE?

You can purchase a copy of "What to Expect on the ISEE" from ERB for \$15. The easiest way to order is through ERBs website: [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org). You may also call ERB. This booklet contains a limited number of actual test questions, so use it wisely.

## Which schools require the ISEE?

The following list is taken from the ISEE 2004-2005 Student Guide.

### **Los Angeles area:**

Berkeley Hall School  
Brentwood School  
Campbell Hall  
Chadwick School  
Crossroads School  
Harvard-Westlake School  
Marlborough School  
Marymount High School  
Milken Community High School  
Oakwood School  
Pacific Hills School  
Rolling Hills Preparatory School  
The Archer School  
The Buckley School  
The Mirman School  
The Wesley School  
Turningpoint School  
Viewpoint School  
Windward School

### **Pasadena area:**

Alverno High School  
Flintridge Preparatory School  
High Point Academy  
Maranatha High School  
Mayfield Senior School  
Polytechnic School  
The Chandler School

# Get to know the HSPT

The HSPT, or High School Placement Test, is used by many Catholic schools to assess 8<sup>th</sup> grade applicants for 9<sup>th</sup> grade only. The test is developed by Scholastic Testing Service (STS) and is sometimes referred to as the STS exam or STS-HSPT. The HSPT is offered in two different versions: the Closed HSPT and the Open HSPT.

The **Closed HSPT** is administered by the school, but *scored by STS*. Closed HSPT scores are compared to national standard distribution norms, so nationwide percentiles can be computed.

The **Open HSPT** is administered *and scored* by the school, so STS does not deal directly with student results. The Open HSPT uses old versions of the Closed HSPT.

You can find out a limited amount of information about the test at [www.ststesting.com](http://www.ststesting.com).

## What does the HSPT test?

There are five multiple-choice sections on the HSPT:

Section *	Questions	Content	Time Limit
Verbal Skills	60	Synonyms, antonyms, analogies, logic, and verbal classification questions.	16 minutes
Quantitative Skills	52	Series, geometric comparisons, non-geometric comparisons, and number manipulations.	30 minutes
Reading	62	General and specific questions on short passages of varying styles on a range of topics.	25 minutes
Mathematics	64	Mathematical concepts and problem-solving questions based on arithmetic, elementary algebra, and basic geometry.	45 minutes
Language	60	Capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and composition.	25 minutes

\* The sections may appear in a different order.

Total test time: approximately 2 hours 30 minutes

Total questions: 298

## How is the HSPT scored?

HSPT scores are reported on a 200 to 800 scale. Before calculating your scaled score, the school or STS first calculates a raw score. The raw score is computed by adding up all of a student's correct answers. **(Since wrong answers do not count against your score, students should never leave a question blank on the HSPT. Guess on all HSPT questions!)** For the Closed HSPT, STS converts raw scores to scaled scores using a standard deviation, normal distribution curve.

## When do you take the HSPT?

The HSPT is generally administered in December and January, but test dates vary by school. For test dates, contact the schools directly.

## How do you register for the HSPT?

Registration is done by individual schools. Some schools don't require registration, but you should contact the schools to find out if registration is required.

## What official practice materials are available for the HSPT?

Unfortunately, no *official* practice materials are available. Several test preparation companies produce sample tests. While these tests are useful, they are not exactly like the HSPT.

## Which schools require the HSPT?

The following list contains some schools in the Los Angeles area that use the HSPT:

Chaminade College Preparatory  
Cornelia Connelly High School  
Crespi Carmelite  
Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy

Loyola High School of Los Angeles  
Mater Dei High School  
Villanova Preparatory School (Ojai)

# Get to know the SSAT

The SSAT, or Secondary School Admissions Test, is used by very few private schools in the Los Angeles area. Most of the schools that use the SSAT are in the San Francisco area. In addition, several schools in Ojai /Ventura use the test. Many of the schools that use the SSAT are boarding schools. The test is given by the Secondary School Admission Test Board.

The SSATB can be reached at (609) 683-4440 or on the web at [www.ssat.org](http://www.ssat.org).

There are two levels of the SSAT:

The **Lower Level** is used for students currently in grades 5 through 7 who are applying for admission to grades 6 and 8.

The **Upper Level** is used for students currently in grades 8 through 11 who are applying for admission to grades 9 through 12.

## What does the SSAT test?

The SSAT includes a 25-minute writing sample and four 30 or 40-minute multiple-choice sections. The test sections break down as follows:

Section *	Questions	Content	Time Limit
Verbal	60	30 synonyms and 30 analogies	30 minutes
Quantitative I	25	Concepts from arithmetic, elementary algebra, and basic geometry that require doing “math computation similar to what you do in school or what is useful in everyday life.”	30 minutes
Reading Comprehension	40	General and specific questions on 7-8 short passages of varying styles on a range of topics.	40 minutes
Quantitative II	25	Same as Quantitative I	30 minutes
Essay	1	A short response to a range of topics designed to show writing ability. Not scored, but sent to schools.	25 minutes

\* The sections may appear in a different order.

Total test time: approximately 2 hours 35 minutes

Total questions: 150 multiple-choice plus an essay

## How is the SSAT scored?

Lower Level test scores are reported for each subject on a scale of 230 to 320.

Upper Level test scores are reported for each subject on a scale of 250 to 350.

Before calculating your scaled score, the SSATB first computes a raw score by adding up all of your correct answers and then subtracting 1/4 point for each wrong answer (blank answers have no effect on your score). **(Since students are penalized for wrong answers, students should only guess if they can eliminate at least one answer choice!)** The SSATB then converts raw scores to scaled scores using a standard deviation, normal distribution curve.

## When is the SSAT offered?

The SSAT can be taken on any of 7 annual test dates, or a student can schedule a time to take the test at an independent testing center (ITC).

2004-2005 test dates are:

November 13, 2004

December 11, 2004

January 8, 2005

February 5, 2005

March 5, 2005

April 16, 2005

June 11, 2005

## How do you register for the SSAT?

The SSATB allows for registration by mail, fax, and Internet at [www.ssat.org](http://www.ssat.org). You may also download a student registration guide online or call (609) 683-4440 to have a registration form mailed to you. Regular registration typically ends about 3 weeks before the test date. Late registration (additional fee applicable) ends about 2 weeks before the test date. Students may also be able to take the test as a walk-in for an additional fee. You can write to the SSATB at: SSAT, CN 5339, Princeton, NJ 08543.

## What official practice materials are available for the SSAT?

You can purchase a copy of "Preparing and Applying" from SSATB for \$22. The easiest way to order is to call (609) 683-4440 or download an order form from the website. The book contains a limited number of sample SSAT tests, so use it wisely.

## Which schools require the SSAT?

The following list of California schools was obtained from the SSAT website in early October, 2004. Many are boarding schools in central or northern California.

### **Schools that use the SSAT:**

All Saints' Episcopal Day School  
Aristos Academy  
Army & Navy Academy  
Bentley School  
Brandeis Hillel School  
Cascade School  
Castilleja School  
Cate School  
Cathedral School for Boys  
Children's Day School  
Chinese American International School  
Convent of the Sacred Heart Elementary School  
Convent of the Sacred Heart High School  
Crane School  
Crystal Springs Uplands School  
Drew School  
Dunn School  
Fairmont Private Schools - Preparatory Academy  
Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy (La Canada)  
Hamlin School  
Happy Valley School (Ojai)  
Harker School  
Idyllwild Arts Academy  
International High School of FAIS  
International School of the Peninsula  
Jewish Community High School of the Bay  
Katherine Delmar Burke School  
Kehillah Jewish High School  
Lick-Wilmerding High School  
Marin Academy  
Marin Country Day School  
Marin Horizon School  
Marin Primary & Middle School  
Menlo School  
Midland School  
Mount Madonna School  
Mount Tamalpais School  
Oak Grove School

Ojai Valley School  
Presidio Hill School  
Saint Mark's School  
San Domenico School  
San Francisco Day School  
San Francisco University High School  
Santa Catalina School  
Sonoma Academy  
Southwestern Academy  
Stevenson School  
Stuart Hall for Boys  
Stuart Hall High School  
The Athenian School  
The Bay School of San Francisco  
The Branson School  
The Marin School  
The Nueva School  
The San Francisco School  
The Thacher School (Ojai)  
The Webb Schools (Claremont)  
Town School for Boys  
Urban School of San Francisco  
Villanova Preparatory School (Ojai)  
Woodside Priory School

### **Schools considering the SSAT:**

Army & Navy Academy  
Convent of the Sacred Heart Elementary School  
Crystal Springs Uplands School  
Dunn School  
Fairmont Preparatory Academy (Anaheim)  
Kehillah Jewish High School  
Menlo School  
Ojai Valley School  
Southwestern Academy  
Stuart Hall for Boys  
Stuart Hall High School  
Woodside Priory School

# Other Resources

## How can I find out more about private schools?

### Books:

There are several books available that offer further information on private schools in Los Angeles and the nation. You may find the following books helpful:

*The Los Angeles Private School Guide* by Fiona Whitney

*The Los Angeles Guide to Private Schools* by Victoria Goldman

*Peterson's Private Secondary Schools 2005* by Peterson Guides

*Peterson's Game Plan for Getting Into Private School* by Peterson Guides

*The Best Private High Schools and How to Get In* by Leana Frank (this book focuses mostly on schools in the northeastern US)

If you choose to buy these books, try to get the most up-to-date versions. Not all are updated annually. All should be available from Amazon.com if you can't find them in your local bookstore.

### Websites:

Most schools have websites with varying degrees of information. There are also thousands of websites that list school information. The following are just a few:

**www.ed.gov** The US Department of Education. Public school lists and information are available under the Parents section.

**nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch** The National Center for Education Statistics. You can do fairly sophisticated searches for private schools. (This is a government run service. There is a lot of education information available from NCES's main website [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov))

**privateschool.miningco.com/cs/usschools/** Private School Information from About.com. Find listings of schools by state, city or specialty with links to the schools' websites.

**www.boardingschoolreview.com** Selected Boarding School Information.

**www.nais.org** National Association of Independent Schools. Find information about member schools.

**www.eschoolsearch.com** A huge database of schools searchable by various criteria with a limited amount of information about each school.

## How can I prepare for the ISEE, HSPT and SSAT?

### Tutorials and Classes:



Obviously, we're in the business of helping students improve their test scores. Our teachers are highly experienced, effective, nurturing and adept at adjusting our focus and techniques to best suit individual students. We understand the intricacies of each individual test and are experts in standardized testing techniques in general.

Achieve Tutorials offers individual tutorials and small group classes organized to fit our students' schedules and individual needs. We come to your home, provide all necessary materials, and give detailed feedback on practice tests.

We also offer academic tutorials covering most elementary, junior high and high school subjects. We thrive on developing creative, intelligent, long-term relationships with our students.

Rates for our tutorials are based on student year. (We don't package a specific number of hours because individual students need different amounts of assistance.) We charge \$50 per hour for students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and below, \$75 per hour for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and \$100 per hour for 8<sup>th</sup> graders and above. If you are interested in rates for small groups of 3 or more students, please call us.

Visit [www.AchieveTutorials.com](http://www.AchieveTutorials.com), email [info@achievetutorials.com](mailto:info@achievetutorials.com) or call (310) 850-2616.

**Test Preparation Books:**

*Cracking the SSAT & ISEE* by The Princeton Review  
*Cracking the COOP/HSPT* by The Princeton Review  
*Kaplan SSAT & ISEE* by Kaplan  
*Kaplan COOP & HSPT* by Kaplan  
*Master the SSAT and ISEE* by Arco  
*Master the Catholic High School Entrance Exams* by Arco  
*Barron's How to Prepare for the SSAT/ISEE* by Barron's  
*Barron's How to Prepare for the COOP/HSPT* by Barron's  
*Peterson's SSAT/ISEE Success* by Peterson's  
*Catholic High School Entrance Exams* by Cliffs Test Prep  
*The Best Test Preparation for the COOP & HSPT* by Research & Education

If you choose to buy these books, try to get the most up-to-date versions. Not all are updated annually. All should be available from Amazon.com if you can't find them in your local bookstore.

**Additional test information websites:**

**[www.test-preparation.net](http://www.test-preparation.net)** A comparison/evaluation of test prep books and courses for the ISEE and HSPT. It's fairly limited.

## What steps should you take to pick the right school?

Choosing the right school for your child is not an easy task. You need to do your homework and research the individual schools. Talk to parents, students, teachers, school counselors, friends and professionals. You should consider all of the following and more when choosing which schools to apply to:

- Educational Philosophies
- Admissions Requirements
- Difficulty Level (for your child)
- Class Size
- Sports and other Extracurricular Opportunities
- Student Body Makeup
- College Admissions Success
- Cost

**Do** remember to set reasonable goals. Choose schools that might be a reach, but also have some back-up schools.

**Do** keep organized!

**Don't** overburden yourself with too many applications.

**Don't** procrastinate!

## A Parent's Checklist for Junior High and High School Applications

<b>School Name</b>	
Address:	
Phone:	
Contact:	
Website	

### School Visit:

		<b>Date</b>
Did you schedule a school visit?	Y / N	
Did you schedule an interview?	Y / N	

### Application:

		<b>Date</b>
What is the application deadline?		
Did you receive an application?	Y / N	
Did you complete the application?	Y / N	
General Information?	Y / N	
Student Responses/Essays?	Y / N	
Application Fee?	Y / N	
Photograph?	Y / N	
Other:	Y / N	
Other:	Y / N	
Did you submit the application?	Y / N	
Did you get teacher recommendations?	Y / N	
Did you get administrative recommendations?	Y / N	
Did your school send an academic/school record report?	Y / N	
Did your school send a transcript?	Y / N	
Did you submit financial aid forms?	Y / N	
Other:	Y / N	
Other:	Y / N	

### Admissions Test:

Is a test required?	Y / N
Which test is required?	<input type="checkbox"/> ISEE <input type="checkbox"/> HSPT <input type="checkbox"/> SSAT <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Did you register for the test?	Y / N
Is there a test deadline?	Y / N   Date:
What is the test location?	
What is the test date?	