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Getting ready for the admission

by PREPSKILLS INC.

As parents begin to think about placing their children in independent or private schools for the 2005 academic year, one of the most frightening pieces of the puzzle is the admission process.

It is not as easy as it appears. As a matter of fact, the whole prospect has become mind-boggling.

A few words of advice for those wishing to embark on this journey.

Give yourself at least a year. That's the advice given by admissions directors to parents hoping to enroll their child in a private school. It's ideal to start making inquiries a year before the September the child is to enter a school. Traditional entry years are kindergarten, Grade 7 and Grade 9.

Demand for places in private and independent schools continues to rise and competition is intense. This is due mainly to the fact that independent schools have maximum class sizes; when they have reached capacity, they have reached capacity.

For starters, begin researching the schools you are interested in. Use the Internet to check Web sites, attend open houses, ask questions, and talk to other parents whose children already attend the school. Make sure to look for a school with strengths in the areas that interest your child, like computers, art, sports, or music.

Choosing a private school involves considerable effort on the part of the parents and certainly the child should be involved in the process to ensure that there is a "good fit."

Schools look for families who are likely to participate in fundraising and volunteering. The parents also have to be prepared to join the school community.

Entry into private school is not a simple matter of enrollment and paying the tuition. Many private schools require the child to successfully complete a standardized preparation test to gain admission.

Many Ontario schools use the SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test). The SSAT measures a student's ability in reading comprehension, synonyms, analogies, essay writing, and math. Exams may vary and test scores are weighted differently from school to school.

The SSAT is administered on two levels: The Lower Level and the Upper Level. Students who are currently in grades 5 through 7 take the Lower Level test, and the students who are currently in grades 8 through 11 take the Upper Level test.

There are fundamental skills and facts that students need to master in order to do well on standardized tests. The basic areas covered on most standardized tests are reading comprehension, math, vocabulary and essay writing. The test is multiple choice except for the essay portion.

Each group of questions (except for reading comprehension questions) starts out with relatively easy problems and progressively moves on to more difficult problems.

The score is broken down into three categories: verbal, math, and reading comprehension. A student receives a raw score for each section. ETS (Educational Testing Services) calculates the raw score by giving one point for each correct answer and subtracting one quarter point for each incorrect answer. The raw score is then converted to a scaled score for each section. For the upper level test, the scaled score falls between 250 and 350. For the lower level test, the scaled score falls between 230 and 320. The student also receives a total scaled score.

In addition, the report contains two percentile scores that let the student know how she performed with respect to other students in her grade. The national percentile score tells how your scores compare to those of students nationally. For example, a national percentile scores of 70 means that the student scored as well as or better than 70% of the students in his/her grade.

Because each school has its own standards for admission, it is difficult to say what a "good" score is. In general, schools consider an applicant's independent school scores, rather than the national percentile scores or scaled scores. When visiting the school for an interview, it is important to ask what those particular schools average or minimum requirements are.

The essay is not scored, but sent directly to the admissions committees of the schools to which you apply. Many schools consider writing skills as a factor for admission and may want to see how well the student writes under test conditions.

If your child is writing a test other than the SSAT, it is important that you find out the format of the test. It is also critical to understand the scoring or guessing penalties used.

Be aware that you may register for only one Ontario Consortium SSAT test per academic year.



To register for the Ontario Consortium SSAT, visit www.ssat.org/ontario

Most schools that use standardized tests are aware of their limitations and use them only as part of an overall evaluation of the child.

Admission procedures may also consider previous school report cards, teacher evaluations, letters of reference, and a detailed interview.

This certainly can be a daunting experience, not only for the child but also the parents. Both feel overwhelmed by the process and options. In order to alleviate stress and prepare their child, many are seeking the assistance of tutoring services.

But “caveat emptor”! Remember that entry into private school is a process that involves the whole family. The importance of test scores, interviews, and applications should not be underestimated. Make sure that the person or company hired is highly competent and well versed in the SSAT and the admission process.

“Doing your homework” now takes on a whole new perspective.

PREPSKILLS INC., industry leader in admission test preparation.
For additional information visit the website at

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