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Navigating the Private School Admission Process. [» Go Back](#)

- April 8, 2008

According to the report "Ontario's Private Schools: Who Chooses Them and Why?", published by The Fraser Institute, an independent Canadian research

organization, parents are choosing private schools because they feel the public system isn't meeting the needs of their children. While enrolment in Ontario's publicly funded schools has not even doubled over the last four decades, attendance at private schools has more than quadrupled. Demand for placements in private schools continues to rise, and the competition has become intense.

Parents generally view private schools as having superior resources, more dedicated teachers, smaller classes, and a more academic environment. Parents are looking for schools that show strong leadership, clear goals, flexibility, good discipline, high expectations and parent-teacher collaboration. Many parents believe they will find those qualities in a private school such as Upper Canada College, Appleby, University of Toronto Schools, Havergal, St. Michael's College or a number of other private schools in Ontario. As parents begin to think about placing their children in an independent or private school, they should bear in mind that it is not as easy as it appears. As a matter of fact the process has become quite mind-boggling. Here are some tips to help you navigate the overall private school admission process:

- (1) Give yourself at least 12 to 18 months. Allow yourself plenty of time by starting at least a year before the date of admission to minimize stress and maximize efficiency in making your decisions.
- (2) Do your homework. There are many different private schools. Involve your child in this process and do your research, including attending open houses, and talking to other parents and children already at the schools. Be sure to look for a school with strengths in the areas that interest your child. Consider your families priorities and your child's academic strengths and learning style. Schools are in the best position to comment on their specific requirements and should welcome your inquiries. Seek expert advice and guidance to ensure that the "right" school is the one that "fits" best for your child.
- (3) Prepare for the Admissions Test and the Interview. The admission test is a critical factor in the admission process, as is the interview. School report cards, teacher evaluations, letters of references are also important factors. The admission tests measure ability in reading comprehension, synonyms, analogies, essay writing and math. The most common standardized tests used for private school admission are the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT), Canadian Achievement Test (CAT), and the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE). Test-taking skills can improve in a relatively short period of time and it is important that students learn the skills and strategies necessary to help them maximize their scoring potential.

For an increasing number of families, preparing for the common SSAT admission test has become a core competitive strategy in leveling the playing field for private school admission. Understanding HOW to take the test is an important part of the process in helping children succeed. Children need to understand the difference between an "academic" school test and a multiple choice "standardized" test such as the SSAT that involves a scoring penalty for incorrect answers. It's not about more tutoring, it's about developing the specific skills required to give students the advantage and confidence to transfer their knowledge to a test-taking situation. As with any skill development, continuous practice is necessary to build confidence and skill level.

For the critical interview component, students should emphasize leadership potential and extra curricular involvement. Schools are interested in building a strong community and want to ensure that the students truly be happy within their learning and enrichment environment. Parents will also want to consider travel, tuition and their child's general interests and aspirations in making their final decisions. In the end, schools and parents are really after the same ideal: a good fit between school and student.

As an increasing number of parents turn to private and independent schools for their child, "doing your homework" takes on a whole new perspective!

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