

A young boy with short dark hair is sitting at a desk, looking down at a piece of paper. He has his right hand resting on his forehead, with his index finger pointing upwards, suggesting he is thinking or concentrating. He is holding a pencil in his left hand, which is resting on the paper. The background is a solid light blue color. The text "PARENTS' TOP TEN QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ISEE UPPER LEVEL" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

PARENTS' TOP TEN QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ISEE UPPER LEVEL

Elevate Prep
www.elevateprep.com



Question 1

WHAT IS THE ISEE UPPER LEVEL?

The ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam) is an admissions test used by many independent schools throughout the United States and abroad. The upper level test is used for students in 8th grade through 11th grade.

Question 2

WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEST?

The test is broken up into the following five sections:

Section 1 - Verbal Reasoning:

The Verbal Reasoning section is made up of 40 questions, and students are given 20 minutes to complete the section. The section is broken up into synonym questions and sentence completion questions.

Section 2 - Quantitative Reasoning

The Quantitative Reasoning section is made up of 37 questions, and students are given 35 minutes to complete the section. The section is broken up into two parts: word problems and quantitative comparisons.

Section 3 - Reading Comprehension

The Reading Comprehension section is made up of 36 questions, and students are given 35 minutes to complete the section. The section is made up of six reading passages each accompanied by six questions.

Section 4 - Mathematics Achievement

The Mathematics Achievement section is made up of 47 questions, and students are given 40 minutes to complete the section. The questions in this section cover a large range of math topics and are more straightforward than the word problems found in the Quantitative Reasoning section.

Section 5 - Essay

The Essay section asks students to respond to a prompt, and students are given 30 minutes to complete the essay.

Question 3

HOW AND WHEN DO I SIGN UP FOR THE TEST?

The ISEE is administered several times throughout the year by ERB (Educational Records Bureau), but the majority of the testing dates are in the fall and early winter. The available test dates will depend on your location, and registration for the 2019-2020 testing seasons does not open up until early August. To register for a test, you'll need to make an account with ERB: <https://www.erblearn.org/parents/isee-registration#registration>.

Question 4

IS ONLINE OR PAPER TESTING BETTER?



The benefits of online tests are that there are more available test dates, you can sign your student up a few weeks before the test, and students can type their essays. The downsides of online tests are that students cannot mark up their test, they are not in a familiar classroom setting with their peers, and they may be taking the test next to adults.



The benefits of paper tests are that students can mark up their tests and show their work, and students take the test in a familiar setting surrounded by their peers. The downsides of paper tests are that there are fewer test dates available, so you need to sign your student up months in advance, and students sometimes make mistakes when filling in scantrons.

We strongly advise that students take a paper test. The test taking strategies that students learn require them to write things down on their test booklets: underlining reading passages, crossing out incorrect answer choices, and showing work on the math sections.

Question 5

HOW MANY TIMES CAN YOU TAKE THE TEST?

The ISEE is broken up into the following testing seasons:

FALL				WINTER				SPRING/SUMMER			
AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL

Students are allowed to retake the ISEE but can only take the test once each testing season. For example, if you take a test in August, you cannot take another test until December.

Question 6

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD TAKE THE TEST?

When your child takes the test depends on a few different factors:



Math Class. Your student's math level will play a large role in when he or she should take the ISEE. The ISEE Quantitative Reasoning and Mathematics Achievement sections cover topics from Algebra 1 and geometry and a few from Algebra 2. If your student has already finished Algebra 2, then you can sign him or her up for the test as early as you want. If your student is currently in Geometry, Algebra 1, or Pre-Algebra, you want to wait and take the test later in the fall or early winter, so your student can learn more of the concepts that show up on the test.



Academic Strengths and Weaknesses. Your student's academic strengths and weaknesses can help determine when he or she should take the ISEE. If your student is strong in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math, and he or she is a strong test taker, then there won't be as much test preparation required. If your student struggles in one or more areas of the test, you will need to do some additional test prep to strengthen the weak areas.



Schedule and Life Events. You should consider your schedule and important life events when deciding when your student should take the ISEE. Things to consider are family vacations, school trips, sports tournaments, and other time-consuming events. Don't sign your student up for a test around the time that he or she has another time-consuming event; you want your student to have enough time to prepare for the test and be mentally focused on test day.

Typically, we advise our students to take the test twice: once in November and once in December or January. This allows students to use the summer to start preparing; students will also learn some of the material covered on the test during their first few months of school.

Question 7

HOW IS THE ISEE SCORED?

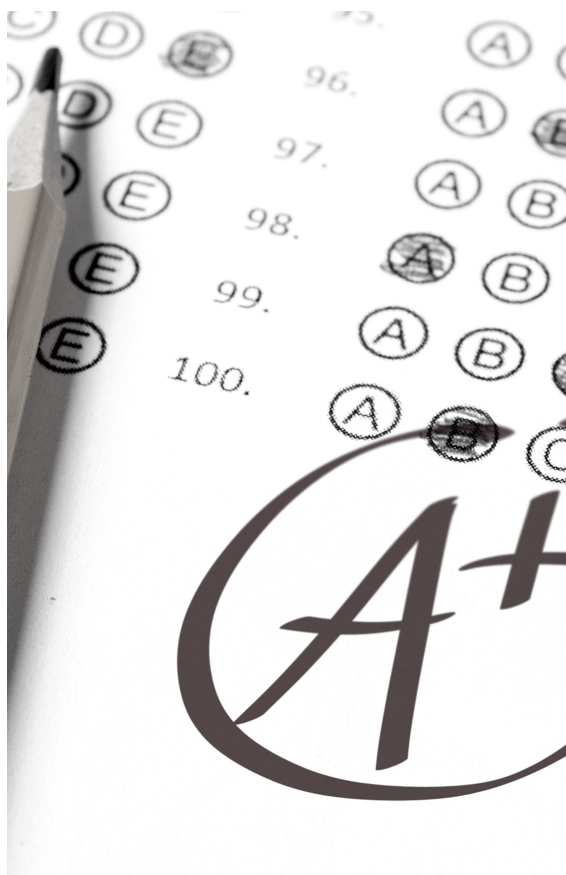
The ISEE consists of four sections which are scored separately and included on a report that is sent to you and any schools that you choose. The fifth section of the test, the essay section, is not scored; an unscored copy of the essay is sent to each school that receives your student's score report. Each section is given a scaled score, a stanine, and a percentile. Below is an explanation of each type of score.

Scaled Score: Scaled scores range from 760 to 940 for each section. Scaled scores are based on a student's raw score (the number of questions the student answered correctly). The ERB administers multiple versions of the ISEE Upper Level each year, and scaled scores take into account the small differences between the different versions of the test. Regardless of which test version your student takes, the scaled score has the same meaning.

Percentile: Percentiles show how a student scored compared to other students in the norm group for the ISEE Upper Level. The percentiles are based on scores from all students in a given grade who have taken the test over the past three years. A percentile rank of 75 on a given section indicates that the student scored as well as or better than 75% of all students in the norm group and less well than 24%. The highest percentile a student can score is a 99th percentile.

Stanine: Stanines simplify scores by breaking them into a range of 1 to 9, with 5 as a midpoint. Each stanine score represents a percentile range. The percentile range for each stanine is shown in the table to the right. It's important to note that the percentiles are not evenly distributed across the stanines, and a majority of students receive a stanine in between 4 and 6.

STANINE	PERCENTILE
1	1-3
2	4-10
3	11-22
4	23-39
5	40-59
6	60-76
7	77-88
8	89-95
9	96-99



Question 8

WHAT IS A GOOD SCORE ON THE ISEE?

A “good score” on the ISEE depends on which school your student is applying to. In general, schools say that stanines of 5 or above are strong enough for a student to be considered, and then the school looks at the other parts of the application: grades, recommendations, interviews, and essays. This cut off score varies from school to school, and very competitive schools may be looking for higher scores. From our experience in the Bay Area, students with stanines of 5 and above can get into competitive schools if they are a good fit, and students with stanines of 8s and 9s can get rejected from schools if they are not a good fit. A “good fit” means a student fits into the school culture and has values that are aligned with the mission of the school.

Question 9

MY CHILD GETS GOOD GRADES IN SCHOOL, WHY IS HIS/HER SCORE SO LOW?

The majority of test takers (about 55%) score somewhere in between a stanine of 4 and 6, or a percentile of 23rd to 76th. Most parents are confused when their child receives these scores. We often get asked if this is comparable to scoring between a 25% and 75% on a school test. The answer is no. The ISEE is not comparable to school tests or other standardized tests that your students have taken at school. ISEE percentile and stanine scores compare students to all of the other students taking the exam. Students taking the ISEE are usually high-achieving students, so your student’s score is compared to bright, high-achieving students. This makes it tough to always score in the top percentile or stanine on the test. The exam is meant to highlight students who have extraordinary verbal, reading, and math abilities, and these exceptional students are the ones who normally score in between the 7-9 stanine range, or 77th-99th percentile range.

Question 10

HOW AND WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD PREPARE FOR THE ISEE?

Because the ISEE Upper Level is a difficult test, we advise students to give themselves 4 to 6 months to prepare. This is not a test that students can cram for in a few weeks, especially if a student has not covered all of the math material that shows up on the exam in school. There are a few different options for preparing for the test:



Self Prep with Books: Self prep books provide students with strategies, practice problems, and practice tests to prepare for the test. This option is for self motivated students who have already learned all of the content that shows up on the test in school and just need to review and brush up on a few topics for the test.



Group Classes: Group classes offer a collaborative way for students to prepare and teach a broad overview of concepts and strategies. Since instructors are teaching to the entire group of students, this option does not typically allow students to personalize their prep and focus on their weak areas.



One-on-One Tutoring: One-on-one tutoring is the most expensive option for ISEE prep and provides students with a personalized prep program with one-on-one attention. This option is for students who are not as self motivated and need a more rigorous and structured prep program.



Online Programs: Online programs are the best option if you're looking for effectiveness and affordability. The flexibility of online programs allows students to customize their prep program to fit their specific test prep goals and schedule. These programs come at a fraction of the cost of one-on-one and group tutoring.

WANT TO START PREPARING FOR THE ISEE?

Elevate Prep currently offers a comprehensive online program for the ISEE Upper Level. Our curriculum has over 30 hours of explanation videos, over 2500 practice problems, and has helped students increase their scores by an average of over 40 percentile points. To learn more about our programs email ISEEprep@elevateprep.com, or get started with our free overview and strategy course at www.elevateprep.com.