

The ISEE Entrance Exam: Is Three Times A Charm? by Matthew Hayutin

Description



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Dear Readers:

Iâ€™m excited to publish guest post by Matthew Hayutin of [Hayutin & Associates](#). I think youâ€™ll find this piece helpful since the ISEE often causes stress for both parents and kids who are applying to L.A. private schoolsâ€”that was definitely the case for our family and my kids could only take it once. Now kids can take it 3 times! But should they? Hereâ€™s more information on that question â€”Christina

Is Three Times A Charm?

Guess what, folks? [The ISEE \(Independent School Entrance Exam\)](#), a torturous, standardized test once offered only once per school year, is now available 3 times a year! Doesnâ€™t that sound awesome? I hear all the test prep mills tapping their calculators, working on an algorithm to capitalize on independent school admissions anxiety.

The ISEE is typically required for admission at most Los Angeles-based, independent and private day schools for prospective students who are candidates for entry into grades 5 and up. Just to add to the confusion, there are other standardized tests mandated for admission to parochial and boarding schools.

But back to the ISEE: why would you put your kid through an absurdly long test twice, or even three times? Isn't that cruel and unusual punishment?

Not necessarily.

Don't get me wrong—we love the "one and done" approach to ISEE prep: students prepare well, take the test once and tap out.

But what about kids who fall ill the night before the big exam?

Or the ones who just have a really lousy day and leave too many easy points on the table?

Sometimes just the promise of a retake helps students relax into the test and perform better. And voilà! No retake necessary.

We're talking about three ISEE testing seasons:

Fall (August-November)

Winter (December-March)

Spring/Summer (April-July)

Unless you just moved and your student is applying somewhere after conventional admissions deadlines, just forget that last one. It's all about the first two seasons.

Every student deserves a custom approach and strategic timeline, but here's the typical trajectory many test prep gurus like us recommend:

Register for a date in the fall, October or November, and a second one in December.

Unless you're reading this too late (I'm not judging you) and your child didn't start preparing in time (still not judging you), pull the trigger sometime in December. January is no fun. Your entire family will be exhausted by then from all the applications. Wouldn't you rather be on vacation so you can have cocktails with fancy ice and forget all this nonsense?

Plus some schools don't love waiting until January for test results, so perform your due diligence and chart those deadlines.

If your child performs well enough on test one in the fall season, make like the protagonist in Jordan Peele's seminal film and GET OUT. Cancel the second ISEE sitting, even if you forfeit the registration fees.

How will you know your child did well enough to run, not walk away? If your daughter has put in the time, including sitting for simulated practice exams, you'll already know all too well how she's trending in terms of those icky stanines (1-9). You'll know if she peaked, plateaued, or fell flat.

Many kids prepare over the summer to take the edge off all that fall test prep and application pressure. It's a great way to build a foundation and make a more informed decision about how much test prep is even warranted come September. If your child is already booked all summer, fret not. Just plan on a

regular weekly effort come fall.

But wait—you have another agonizing decision to make: will your child suffer less through the exam on paper or computer?

Give this one some thought. If your kid isn't a proficient typist, bye bye computer. That timed essay is excruciating for anyone who struggles to hunt and peck.

There are exceptions. Kids with illegible handwriting and no laptop accommodation may want to consider a Prometric Center—that's where you have to drive if your child isn't taking the thing on paper. It's not a warm and fuzzy place, with logistical challenges of its own, but plenty of kids go there and do just fine. At least you get to book your own appointment.

There's always more strategy, but ultimately, this ISEE thing is not in your control.

So bite down. Hold your child's hand. Look into his or her perfect eyes and remind yourself of what you already know, deep down: you're going to get through this.

[Matthew Hayutin](#), founding owner at [Hayutin & Associates](#), is a parent and educator who still dreams that one day the ISEE will just go away—but not get replaced by something even worse. He serves on the board at PS1 Pluralistic School One, where both of his children attend school.

Coming soon: Matthew explains the details of ISEE scoring including what constitutes a below average, average and above average score.

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