

Mary Miele ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to Be Evolved, a podcast for parents and educators who prioritize developing possibility and expansion within the total educational process for themselves and their children or students. We invite you to listen to the podcast with your child or student in mind and with yourself at the center of the learning experience. Ultimately, our goal is to bridge the gap between educational expertise and research, translating it into practical action. Gaining knowledge plus taking action is what it means to be evolved. Hello everyone. Welcome to be evolved. I'm so excited to talk about today's topic. It's so top of mind and it has to do with your child's precious time, so you're going to want to really listen in and get all that you can. From today's discussion, we're going to be talking about two key tests that students take in order to access different types of schools. One of them is in the private system, the other is in the public system here in New York City, and I know you're going to get a lot from today's discussion from both of our directors are here today. Amy Nathan is the director of student services and she directs our tutoring, executive functioning and test prep. Hi Amy. Nice to see you.

Amy Nathan ([01:25](#)):

So happy to be on again, Mary. Thank you.

Mary Miele ([01:28](#)):

And we also have our director of assessment here, Becky Reback, who's going to be talking a little bit about that. Hi Becky.

Becky Reback ([01:35](#)):

-referenced, meaning that students are compared to other high-performing applicants, not grade-, and you might be dead center in the 50th percentile, or some people might refer to it as the setpoint for students who are in the eighth and ninth grades here in New York City. Hi. Thanks for having me again.

Mary Miele ([01:37](#)):

So happy. Alright, so we're going to get right into it. We're going to talk about the two key tests that we do prepare students for. Now, this is of course in a suite of different types of tests so we can prepare students for more than just these two tests, but we figured we would really talk in detail about these two exams because they're quite popular for many of our students. And to start us off, Amy, if you could tell us a little bit about what is the ISEE? What is that test and why do students take it?

Amy Nathan ([02:11](#)):

Sure. So the ISEE, the independent school entrance exam, it's a admissions exam used by private and independent schools nationwide, and it's for grade school admissions. And the entry points for that start as early as grade two and go all the way up through 12th grade. So students take one of four levels, primary, lower, middle, or upper, and that's based on the grade they are entering or applying for and based on the grades they're entering, the exam may include any of these sections. Verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, reading comprehension, mathematics achievement. There's also an unscored essay that is sent directly to schools for kids applying to upper elementary and middle and high school grades. Something significant that I think many of our students and families are often asking is what makes the IC, the ISEE especially challenging? And it's really that it's norm referenced, meaning that students are compared to other high performing applicants, not grade level averages. So this can be especially challenging in that your student isn't being compared or your child isn't being compared to an average student in their grade or their class. Instead, they're being compared to other students who are applying to selective private schools. So even somebody who is a very strong student can maybe score lower than anticipated or expected because there is such a wide comparison group that's really high achieving.

Mary Miele ([04:01](#)):

That's so interesting. So really, let's say you're at the top of the class, then you might be used to being in the 99th percentile, let's say, but then you take this test and you might be dead center in the 50th percentile and you may be jarred by that information. That's what you're basically saying, right?

Amy Nathan ([04:17](#)):

Correct, correct. And we'll get into ways to deal with that and manage that later.

Mary Miele ([04:24](#)):

Okay, excellent. Well, thank you for that overview. So let us know now about the S-H-S-A-T or some people might refer to it as the SHSAT, for students who are in the eighth and ninth grades here in New York City in particular.

Amy Nathan ([04:40](#)):

Sure. So the S-H-S-A-T is the specialized high school admissions test, and that's used exclusively for admissions into New York City specialized high school. So that's offered to students in eighth grade, some cases ninth grade, and it includes an English language arts section of reading comp, grammar and some revising and editing, and a mathematics section, which has multi-step problem solving, algebra, geometry number sense there isn't an essay, there's no guessing penalty, and you take that test once. There's no option to retake that test. The IC for high school admissions, the IC and the S-H-S-A-T are challenging in different ways. The S-H-S-A-T is challenging academically, but it compares students to all test takers citywide, versus the IC, as I mentioned before, feels harder a little bit sometimes because it compares your child to other high-achieving applicants applying to private schools, performing and selective private schools, and then the S-H-S-A-T gives you access to the selective high schools, Bronx Science, Davidson, et cetera,

Mary Miele ([05:39](#)):

Amazing. So basically, either way, these two tests are very influential and helping your student access very competitive programs. So the ISEE has access to very high performing and selective private schools, and then the S-H-S-A-T gives you access to the selective high schools, Bronx Science, Stuyvesant, et cetera in New York City. Okay. So now let us know, because you've been doing this for a while and you really, I think, have a very clear understanding of the timeline that families should be taking, and a reason that you're suggesting this timeline, you also have to share with us, taking tips and tricks a few weeks or a month before the exam, that it allows us time to, adding onto that is that starting early allows you to strengthen foundational skills in math, reading, who's the director of assessment, who can speak more later to how we can identify where your child or So if you could share with us what is this timeline suggestion, and if you want to get into it also, where is that coming from? How come this is the timeline suggestion? Go ahead and start wherever you'd like there. Yeah,

Amy Nathan ([06:31](#)):

Sure. Yeah, I mean as a parent myself, I love a good timeline. I love to know when I need to start something and what I can anticipate for my kids. So with test prep, one of the biggest misconceptions that I find families sometimes have is believing that test prep is about learning a few test taking tips and tricks a few weeks or a month before the exam when really strong test performance is built and not crammed. There's a lot of ground to cover in these tests, so sometimes it can feel more like a marathon versus a sprint. And we want to make sure that the families that come to us for test prep are set up for success and that their kids are set up for success and feel really good about this process because it definitely is not easy. So generally speaking, Mary, we recommend starting six to eight months in advance.

(07:28):

And that's the reason being is that allows us time to one, identify academic and content area gaps early. There's a lot of ground to cover skill-wise in these tests, especially in the ISEE. You might find that your child or the student really has not even seen some of the content before. So there's a lot of teaching that goes into this test. We find that, especially with the math sections two, moreover adding onto that is that starting early allows you to strengthen foundational skills in math, reading and writing. And we have Becky on here who's Director of Assessment who can speak more later to how we can identify where your child or where the student falls in those foundational skills. Three, starting early allows you to learn test-specific strategies without pressure, without that feeling of, oh, I'm taking this test in a few weeks, and I better hit these scores,,, and how do I land pinpoints test-; five to six months before the exam is the skill-,and -month period before is really about foundational skills, not rushing through practice tests and drilling, and just kind of that high-of my backgroundthe level of understanding. Can you take what you've learned and apply it independently?be fine-tuning, getting into those full--building review sessions, really making sure they have the stamina to sit for this very long test and to perform under time constraints, if that's something that applies to the student, and to really, really make sure their test-s, a month or two ahead of time, really building that stamina for test day and really fine-, first of all, Amy, thank you so much for that really clear timeline and information on what each test is, what we can expect from each test,-based, but then other pieces of it arethat it helps us understand where they are before we even begin, And lastly, and most importantly, build confidence and endurance gradually and really make the child feel successful.

Mary Miele (08:42):

Absolutely, because really here we're all about that lifelong impact that our work has on students. And I know also as a parent, I just feel like I love the process that we take with such care where kids do feel really good about what they're doing. And as someone who studies learning, I think I can just chime in here and say that when you put a child in a position where their brain isn't overloaded or feeling the stress of that cognitive demand, they're going to feel better and more comfortable with the process, which is already going to provide some anxiety and stress because we're preparing for a high stakes exam. So the more we can work ahead of time, the better for everyone. So Amy, can you outline, you just said six to eight months. So what are we doing in the six to eight months, starting at that first touchpoint of, okay, I have a child who is going to be applying for high school in the fall. They're going to take the test in November and December, so it's now February. When do I start and how do you start this process? Sure,

Amy Nathan (09:54):

Go ahead. So about six to eight months before the exam, we like to think about this as academic assessment and planning time. So we like to begin with a comprehensive academic assessment, which Becky Rebeck will discuss what those look like later. But usually the assessment evaluates math, reading, verbal skills, identifies any grade level gaps or advanced strengths as well, pinpoints test specific challenges that might be unique to the IC or the S-H-S-A-T or SSAT, whatever tests they might be taking. And that allows us to really carefully craft and customize a tutoring plan. So families who begin in these earlier months begin with an assessment early, they have this flexibility and far less stress throughout the test prep process. Then I would say anywhere five to six months before the exam is the skill building phase. So we really like to use the data from the student assessment, whether that be an academic or cognitive assessment or a mock test, which we also offer.

(11:02):

We like to use that data to focus the tutoring on addressing and closing any math or reading gaps, strengthening vocabulary and comprehension, building accuracy before speed. That's super important, really making sure that they are accurate and understand the concepts behind what they're doing. And then introducing this test structure without the pressure. So this five to six month period before is really

about foundational skills, not rushing through practice test and drilling and just kind of that high pressure environment. And then I would say three to four months before the exam is really the strategy and application my background's in teaching. So I always like to think of application of skills. That's really the highest of understanding can you take what you've learned and apply it independently. So when three to four months before the students are going to begin applying their skills directly to the test format.

(12:05):

So at this stage we're really looking at time section practice, mock testing, strategy development for pacing and question types, like very detailed error analysis to prevent repeated mistakes and targeted drills for high impact areas, which is done both in the sessions and our tutors will give practice work outside the sessions also for that. So this is when we often see students start to feel more confident in what they're doing and this test is really familiar to them and they're really in a groove here. And then one to two months before the exam, we really want to really be fine tuning, getting into those full length practice tests if they haven't done so already. Going through confidence building review sessions, really making sure they have the stamina to sit for this very long test and to perform under time constraints if that's something that applies to the student and to really, really make sure their test taking endurance is where it needs to be. So I think that this help, this helps, it's almost like broken into four gaps of six to eight months, five to six months, three to four, one to two, what you should do before you reach out to kind of think about what does your family's schedule look like, what does the child's summer look like? We can really work together to customize the timeline for you and make sure that your child's set up for success with these tests.

Mary Miele (13:50):

Amazing. So just learned so much just there. So I feel like for any parent who's going through this process, just to sum up, you're starting six to eight weeks, sorry, months before, and you are getting that assessment so that you know the direction to head in, especially to fill in any academic gaps. Then you're building those skills and really making sure that you understand the math and the reading and the vocabulary, building the accuracy before the speed of things and the strategy of things for the test itself. Then you're getting into the strategy and application period where you're really getting to apply what you know to the test itself. Getting into timed practice strategy development, that error analysis, that's so helpful. Pacing suggestions and targeted drills, and then of course a month or two ahead of time, really building that stamina for test day and really fine tuning the work that you've been doing all along.

(14:52):

If you don't have all of these months, you're not going to be able to get through all of those things. So I really think that's an amazing plan and as a mom who's been through this a couple of times and also going through it soon and imminently, this is a great timeline. I'm very into it. Okay, so now Becky, we have you here. So I'd love to hear a little bit from you as to what you do as students at the very start of all of this for assessment. What are some of the options? Do you have to do all of these assessments or is there some optionality? What would you say regarding this piece?

Becky Reback (15:27):

Yeah, of course. Well first of all, Amy, thank you so much for that really clear timeline and information on what each test is and what we can expect from each test and how the students are being measured. I think that's so important and really half the battle when we're thinking about test prep is making sure we actually understand what we're doing and what we're having our kids do and before we even can get to any of these timelines, as you mentioned, the assessment piece is really important. So we can actually teach your child in a very direct way that it fits for what they need to be learning. So obviously some of this is going to be content based, but then other pieces of it is the strategy of actually taking the test. And

the reason we want to assess is because that helps us understand where they are before we even begin so we can personalize their learning process.

(16:14):

So there's a couple of different ways that we can do that. Of course, first and foremost, we always recommend you also, in addition to some other assessments that might be beneficial, we always want our families to take a mock test of the actual test that they're going to be taking, so that we can get a baseline score before we begin. And that helps us understand where we're starting off and create realistic goals for where we ultimately want to get to when it's actual test-taking time that falls during the admissions process... students who, honestly, ISEE or definitely taking the SSAT and you're deciding between the two, we actually can run a report that can give us a hint as to whether they'll do better on the ISEE, the IC, The other assessments that I really like to pair with the mock test for our families, and Mary you said, do we have to do everything? What do we have? Do you really have optionality here? You can do both of these other two assessments that I'm about to speak about. You can just do one, but I do recommend that you do some level of these assessments in addition to the mock testing because this really will help us create a clear blueprint and understanding of your child's brain and how we can teach them best.

(17:15):

So the first assessment is called the Mind Print Learning assessment. This assessment is an online self-paced cognitive assessment. It looks at the 10 skills that are predictive of academic success. So it looks at reasoning, memory and executive function, and it also measures the students' processing speed and skills such as that. And what it does is it really gives us an understanding or a blueprint of the child's learning profile so we know where their stronger skills are versus areas that we need to support and bolster. For example, something that comes out of this assessment is telling us how they think. Are they flexible thinkers? Are they inflexible thinkers? We have learned over the years and all the test prep that we've done here at Evolved that traditionally students that are flexible thinkers tend to catch on a little bit faster in the prep process to the types of questions and content that are on these assessments.

(18:12):

And so we can kind of set those realistic goals for families. You have a super flexible thinker, I think we can cover this much in this amount of time, or you have a very inflexible thinker. We actually need to start with some strategies for flexible thinking before we can even get to content or strategies for the assessment. And we would have no idea that this is a problem unless we did the mind print learning assessment. So it's one of my favorite assessments to do when we're pairing it honestly with anything, but especially when we're pairing it with test preparation. The mind print learning assessment also gives us an understanding of what type of assessment the student will be most successful in. So if you're deciding if you're not definitely taking the ISEE or definitely taking SHSAT and you're deciding between the two, we actually can run a report that can give us a hint as to whether they'll do better on the ACT or SAT so we don't waste time studying for a test that they will not do well with. And, we do assessments for every school admissions process, but especially for our test prep clients, which your grade level for reading, writing, and are really, and we can see that when they're actually applying that to academic work, we're going to give them strategies that rely on that short-term working memory, so that, of course, in mind print learning;

(19:08):

So that's really beneficial too. If we're not sure which way to go, we can actually have an understanding of where to go so we don't waste time studying for a test that maybe they won't be as successful. On the other assessment that we do assessment for every school admissions process, but especially we like to do this with our test prep clients is the academic assessment. And this really measures our academic skills. Yes, we're looking at are you on grade level for reading, writing, math? But we're also looking at some of those softer academic skills. So we're looking at executive functioning, we're looking at working memory, we're looking at frustration tolerance and how the student is actually functioning when they're given an

academic task to perform. So we care about grade level, but what we really are digging into is those skills that come out when they're actually doing the work.

(19:58):

So we again know how to give them specific strategies. If they have a low frustration tolerance for challenging work, we're going to give them strategies to manage that frustration level. If they have a stronger working memory and we can see that when they're actually applying that to academic work, we're going to give them strategies that's going to rely on that short term working memory so that way they can get stronger in other areas because they have that really strong skill. And again, yes, we can see that some of this in the mock testing. We can see some of this of course in the Mind Print Learning, it talks about working memory, but watching it in action is a whole other level of understanding of how the kid might perform on an assessment like this. So I love to do, in my world, everyone's doing all three, but that's a time commitment, a financial commitment. I totally understand that might not be possible, but doing something, either the mind print or the academic assessment, and pairing it with the mock test, is going to be your best bet for creating the best path forward to have success on these assessments., prepping a student, and the student wasn't necessarily remembering all of the different strategies or how, topped at a certain score,-

Mary Miele (21:04):

Absolutely, and I actually love a cautionary tale here in that we were once, before we had the mind print in place prepping a student and the student wasn't necessarily remembering all of the different strategies or to apply. And we learned as we were implementing the mind print that the working memory was weaker and therefore it was hard for the student to store all of these strategies that the tutor was giving them. And all we really had to do to fix all of this was just simplify the number of strategies the student was dealing with and have them write those strategies on the test scrap paper to get it out of their head to refer to. These are just really impactful strategies that we can apply when we have the information that actually changes everything for a student, including their own confidence in this entire process.

(22:00):

So we have a million stories like that. Also, one other one was when a student was similarly sort of stopped at a certain score and we did the mind print and learned that their processing speed was really, really quite high and very strong, and their memory for the verbal and visual was a little bit weaker in comparison. And so it was actually better in a way for the student to sort of process problems in the test taking process and not necessarily rely so heavily on memory, which a lot of times test preppers and people who are doing this are relying on. And so just knowing that was really different in terms of how we were able to go about the prep and it again, solved everything, got us the results we wanted, but then also guess what? The student was working in a way that really worked for them and not against them, and how would we know if we didn't have this information? So I love that we at evolved have this suite of services that really dials in on what we're promising families, which is to understand that the student and build their skills and then get ready for what is next on their agenda. So I just love all of those kinds of stories. Right,

Becky Reback (23:16):

is so valuable,,-to-eight-I know we talk about them often. One thing I wanted to mention is, yes, we're prepping for these tests, but our goal also is to provide skills for the future too. So your Mind Print your academic assessment, they're going to give us amazing understanding of how we can actually prep them for this test, but we're also going to learn some long-term information as well. So while we're thinking in the short term to be successful on the standardized testing, we also want to be successful in school and at home too, because we can apply a lot of these learnings to how kids function in the house as well. So it's

twofold, which I always think is the best, but obviously today we're focusing on test prep, but just know that it helps the rest of your life too.

Mary Miele ([24:03](#)):

Always. Good to know. I love that. Well, thank you so much for that insight into the assessment piece, which I feel is so impactful and important for everyone to know. So I guess just in closing ab, could you just give us some final thoughts on this and maybe what is the major takeaway that you want everyone listening to Leaf with?

Amy Nathan ([24:20](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think everything Becky was saying that is so valuable and it just makes me think of how amazing time is, and it's such a gift that you could give your child to really give them thoughtful amounts of time to prepare for this and learn something in the process. So we've had amazing clients who have prepped with us and then they ended up maybe even going to an independent school that didn't require the test. And they've said to me, preparing for the test was such an amazing process for my kid to go through though, and they learned so much from it. So I just think starting with a sufficient runway is such a gift that you can give your child and your family because again, it's a marathon, not a sprint to do well. And the best thing that can come out of this is that your child learns how to study, they learn some new skills, bridge any content area gaps, and they come out with more confidence, stronger results, and just feeling really accomplished. So families who start in that six to eight month window really are giving their student a gift.

Mary Miele ([25:35](#)):

I love that. So great. And it's so important to know that you're in such good hands here at Evolved, and I just want to thank Amy and Becky for your time today to share this insight and information with us. And with that, we will close up today's episode. We hope that you enjoyed today's comments and information that you received. If you would like to have more information about how to start tutoring or have an assessment with your child, we will be sure to put all of that information in the show notes, and you can always reach out to us@evolvededucationcompany.com to set up your services for your child. We're so happy that you spent your time with us today. Thank you so much. Talk to you soon. We hope you found this episode of Be Evolved, helpful. Please be sure to review and subscribe. It really helps us to reach more listeners like you have a question or a topic that you'd like us to explore. I'd love to hear from you. You can reach out at any time at admin@evolveded.com. That's A-D-M-I-N at E-V-O-L-V-E-D ed.com. Don't forget, you can find the full transcript for today's episode along with our terms, conditions, and disclaimers and privacy policy at www.evolvededucationcompany.com. Thanks for listening, and until next time, learn well and live well and be evolved.