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How to prepare for high school entrance exams

If you have your heart set on your child attending a specific high school, make sure he or she is well prepared for the entrance exam in the fall. The competition can be stiff and getting a head start by studying a bit this summer could be key.

BY KAMILA HINKSON



COOKIE ET SA GARDE ROBE

Summer will soon arrive but for parents with children finishing Grade 5, school should remain top of mind. If you want your kids to get into a private high school or an enriched program, they will soon have to take what is likely the most challenging test of their academic careers to date – high school entrance exams.

Though it varies based on which school and program your child is applying to, high school entrance exams are generally written in October. The tests are multiple-choice and include sections on French reading and writing, English reading and writing, and math. Many educational experts say that for best results, students should start preparing more than a year in advance.

But if you have not started preparation yet, don't panic. There are several local companies that can help and some books that may prove useful.

Representatives from all three educational centres interviewed for this story said they first evaluate the child by giving him or her a practice test to complete, then offer follow-up services to help the child depending on the results.

Cathy Kermelly is the director at **Stepping Up Resource Centre** in Montreal West. She thinks of herself as a “high school planner” – kind of like a wedding planner, but instead of organizing nuptials, she helps parents and students plan for the transition from elementary to high school.

She said that, ideally, fifth-grade students should have a plan of action for high school as early as possible because the sooner they start practicing for the exam, the easier it will be for them to improve their skills and feel relaxed and confident. She even has fourth graders enrolled whose parents want to nip potential problem areas in the bud.

The evaluation at Stepping Up is a multiple-choice, timed exam that lasts three hours, much like the high school entrance exam. For \$109, the child will do a practice exam, receive an action plan after a consultation on the results, as well as a practice exam booklet and access to a website with approved extra activities.

Beginning in July, the centre will also offer a workshop called “Demystifying the High School Entrance Process,” which will focus on teaching students the skills needed to do well on exams. They also help with preparing for interviews.

And at the end of July, Kermelly will be selling individual practice exam booklets for \$20 at Stepping Up.

Lynda Hoffman, director of learning services and program development at the Learning Associates of Montreal, based in Westmount, suggests parents have their child assessed at the beginning of Grade 5.

She says that when it comes to determining whether a child needs help or not, parents usually do a good job of pointing out the subjects their child may struggle with on the test.

Following the evaluation, the students are tutored one-on-one, which allows the tutor to focus specifically on the child’s needs. Hoffman said students are not only taught how to do well on tests but also how to develop good work habits so they will be equipped when they go to high school (no matter where they end up going).

Académie Eureka in Île-Bizard helps students with French, math, general knowledge (culture, science, geography, history), and English, depending on the high school the child has applied to.

President and founder, Priya Selvarasa, said parents have to realize attitude is just as important as good grades when it comes to success on the exam and in high school.

“It’s not just knowing the material,” she said. “They have to want to do well and be able to take on a lot of work.”

Her school offers group and individual classes at \$20 and \$30 per hour, respectively. Selvarasa also supports the student-centric approach, saying that each plan of action is tailored to suit the child.

Parents who may not want to spend too much money but still want their child to get a little extra practice can pick up **Canadian Curriculum** or **Brain Quest** workbooks, which include exercises tailored for each grade level and cost about \$20 at book stores. There are also workbooks that focus on specific subject matter (English, French, math) and are sold for between \$15 and \$20.

Josée Lambert-Chan works at **Brisson Legris**, a company that works with certain schools to administer tests. She said the best way to prepare a child for their exam is to make sure they go to sleep early the day before and that he or she is relaxed prior to taking the test.

Resources for high school exam preparation

Academie Eureka

514-717-5954

academie-eureka.com

Carolyn Melmed & Associates

514-497-9895

improvingstudyskills.com

Elite College

514-303-8237 or 514-812-6555

elitecollege.ca

Enfant et Compagnie

514-327-8484

enfantetcompagnie.com

J.C. Academy

D.D.O. • 514-675-1828

Lasalle • 514-368-7070

jctutorials.com

Lansdowne Tutoring Centre

514-487-6516

thelansdownecentre.org

Learning Associates of Montreal

514-989-9360

learnmtl.org

Mme. Hébert - French Fluency

514-695-6000

Oxford Learning Centres

D.D.O. • 514-696-0606

N.D.G. • 514-481-4441

St. Laurent • 514-333-4988

Vaudreuil • 450-510-5473

oxfordlearning.com

Stepping Up Resources

438-380-3635

steppingup.net

Strategic Learning Centre

Montreal • 514-739-0075

Pointe Claire • 514-631-9745

strategiclearning.ca

Superkids Learning Centers

Dorval • 514-636-0360

Greenfield Park • 450-466-3213

Montreal • 514-866-8168

St. Laurent • 514-748-8288

superkidslearning.com

Josée Lambert-Chan who works at **Brisson Legris**, a company that works with certain schools to administer their tests, offers parents seven tips about preparing kids for high school and exams. **Read the tips (in French) here.**