

SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS TEST – FAQ ON REDESIGNED TEST

Overview

Starting with the fall 2017 Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT) administration, for admissions to schools in the 2018-19 school year, the SHSAT will be redesigned. The test administered in October and November 2016 for admission to schools in September 2017 was the final administration of the test under the previous design¹.

The purpose of this document is to answer frequently asked questions about the redesigned SHSAT.

What is the SHSAT?

The SHSAT is the competitive, objective, and scholastic achievement examination used as the sole factor to determine admissions to New York City’s Specialized High Schools (with the exception of LaGuardia High School). All current New York City residents in 8th grade or in 9th grade for the first time, and in public, private, and parochial schools who plan to apply to one of these Specialized High Schools must take the SHSAT. The SHSAT is administered in the fall for admission to Specialized High Schools in the following school year (i.e., students seeking admission for September 2018 will take the test in fall 2017). Students interested in taking the SHSAT should speak with their school counselors. Families can also visit a Family Welcome Center to speak to staff from the Office of Student Enrollment.

Why is the SHSAT changing?

The SHSAT is changing in order to better align it to curriculum and instruction students experience in their classrooms on a daily basis. The test was formerly made up of two sections: verbal and math. The verbal section comprised five scrambled paragraphs, ten logical reasoning questions, and five informational reading comprehension passages with six questions each, for a total of 45 questions in the section. The math section comprised a mix of word and computational problems, for a total of 50 questions. The verbal and math sections were worth 50 points each and students had 150 minutes to take the test. This design was used for SHSAT for more than two decades.

Scrambled paragraphs and logical reasoning are not item types that students are likely to see in their day-to-day instruction today and, in fact, for many students, the SHSAT may be the only situation in which they see these types of questions. Given this, NYCDOE is updating the test design based on the New York State Learning Standards, making the test better aligned to the work students are doing in the classroom. While the redesigned SHSAT focuses on content and question types that should be familiar to students based on their instruction, the exam will continue to be challenging, as it is used to identify top performers for competitive Specialized High Schools admissions.

When is the SHSAT changing?

The first administration of the SHSAT with the updated test design will be in fall 2017, for admission to Specialized High Schools in September 2018.

¹ With the exception of the upcoming August 2017 administration for new entrants to New York City; this August 2017 administration is only for September 2017 admission.

How is the SHSAT changing?

There are a number of ways in which the SHSAT is changing for the fall 2017 (and forward) test administration:

- Standard testing time is increasing from 150 minutes to 180 minutes.
- The verbal section is being renamed the English Language Arts (ELA) section.
- The ELA section will no longer include scrambled paragraphs and logical reasoning questions.
- The ELA section will now include questions that address revising/editing skills, in addition to continuing to have reading comprehension passages and questions; all ELA questions will be multiple choice questions.
- The math section will now include five “grid-in” questions, in which students must solve a computational question and provide the correct numerical answer, rather than selecting the answer from various multiple choice options; the math section will also continue to have multiple choice word problems and computational questions.
- All multiple choice questions will now have 4 answer choices instead of the previous design with 5 answer choices.
- Each section (ELA and math) will include 57 items: 47 items in each section will be scored, with each question worth 1 raw score point, and the remaining 10 items in each section will be field test items that are not used in determining a student’s score. Scoring and the process for using test results to determine admission to the Specialized High Schools is not changing. See further below for details.

This table summarizes the redesigned test:

Standard testing time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 180 minutes
ELA section (57 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 revising/editing questions: 5-8 stand-alone questions and 2 passages with 6-8 questions each (<i>see attached sample questions</i>) • 6 reading passages with 5-7 questions each² • All questions are multiple choice questions
Math section (57 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 grid-in questions (<i>see attached sample questions</i>) • 52 multiple choice word problems and computational questions
Other notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All multiple choice questions (all ELA questions; all math questions except grid-in items) will have 4 answer choices instead of 5. • All passages in 2017 will be nonfiction passages; starting in 2018 literary passages and persuasive passages (e.g., editorials) could be included on the test. • Embedded field test passages and items will be interspersed throughout the relevant sections of the test (10 items in each section); students will not be able to determine which questions are the field test questions.

² In future years there could be some small variation in the breakdown between revising/editing questions and reading comprehension questions in the ELA section.

What do the new items look like?

See the attachment for samples of the revising/editing questions that will be part of the ELA section and the grid-in items that will be part of the math section. These sample items also include brief explanations of why the correct answers are correct.

Will there be more practice items available?

Yes, the *2017-18 Specialized High Schools Student Handbook* will include two full-length practice tests. These two practice tests will match the format of the redesigned test. The handbook will be available to all students and schools in hard copy in June 2017. Students and families will also be able to download the handbook here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized/default.htm>.

Why are field test items embedded in the test?

Field testing is a critical component of the test development process, and helps to ensure that tests are reliable, valid, and free of bias. In past years, all field testing associated with the SHSAT took place outside New York City. By embedding field test items on the SHSAT, NYCDOE will be able to further ensure that test items are free of bias for New York City's diverse student population. Field test questions are embedded in many types of standardized tests, ranging from the New York State grades 3-8 ELA and math tests to the SATs.

Will students know which items are the field test items?

No, students will not be able to determine which items are the field test items. These items will be interspersed throughout the relevant section of the test (i.e., the math field test items will be part of the math section of the test) and will look like the operational scored test items. Students should not spend any time trying to determine which items are scored and which items are field test items. An incorrect answer to a field test question has no impact on a student's test score and eligibility for admission.

Will the ELA section still come first, followed by math?

Yes. The previous test started with the verbal section, followed by math. For the redesigned test, ELA will come first and math will continue to be second.

How much time should students spend on each section of the test?

Students will have 180 minutes to complete the redesigned test (unless a student has an extended time accommodation through an IEP or 504 plan, or because the student is an English Language Learner). Students can apportion that time between the two sections as they best see fit. It is recommended that students work carefully, moving at a comfortable pace and keeping track of the time.

Will accommodations continue to be available for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs)?

Yes. Students with disabilities will be provided with the accommodations listed in their IEPs or 504 plans, unless the accommodation is not permitted on the SHSAT, or if the accommodation is not needed on the SHSAT. ELLs and former ELLs taking the SHSAT are granted extended testing time. Bilingual mathematics glossaries in the NYCDOE's nine major languages will also be provided to ELLs and former ELLs on the day of the SHSAT.

Is the scoring process changing? What about the use of results to determine admission to the Specialized High Schools changing?

No. SHSAT scores will continue to be based on the number of correct answers marked. The number of correct answers, called a raw score, is determined for each test taker. Because there are multiple forms of the SHSAT, raw scores from different test forms cannot be compared directly. To make valid score comparisons, a raw score must be converted through a process called calibration into a scaled score. Scaled scores are on a scale that is common to all test forms, making it possible to compare these scores directly. The composite score is the sum of the ELA and math scaled scores. The composite score, in conjunction with students' Specialized High Schools preferences (as marked on the SHSAT answer sheet) and seat availability, will continue to be used to determine admissions to Specialized High Schools.

How does a student sign up to take the SHSAT?

Students interested in taking the SHSAT should speak with their school counselor or a staff member at a Family Welcome Center during the registration period, which opens in September 2017 for this fall's test. Each student who requests testing will be issued a Test Ticket, which will indicate the date, time, and location assigned to the student for testing.

Where can I learn more?

For sample items and updates concerning Specialized High School admissions, please visit:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized/default.htm>.