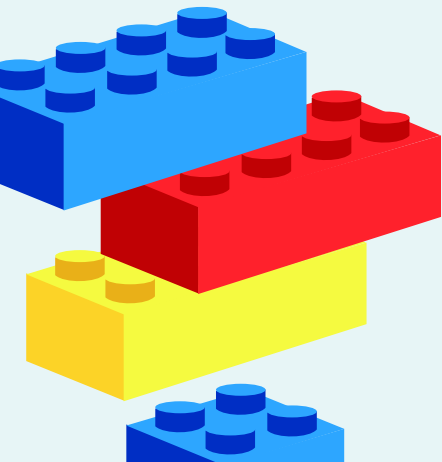




# How to Prepare for Private School Kindergarten Admissions



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A GUIDEBOOK



by: **Caitlin Hasson**

# About the Author

Caitlin Hasson



Caitlin Hasson is a School Placement Advisor with Evolved Education Company, specializing in assisting families in the process of applying their children to private Nursery and Kindergarten programs. Prior to her work at Evolved, she was an educator for ten years in New York City independent schools. She has taught and privately tutored students from Pre-K to Fourth Grade, primarily teaching Kindergarten for the majority of her career in the classroom. Caitlin became increasingly involved in the admissions realm within her previous school, as she assessed Kindergarten applicants in their playgroups, met with applicant families in round table discussions, and observed students in their various preschool settings. She holds a B.A. in Elementary Education and History from Boston College's Lynch School of Education, as well as a M.A. in Curriculum & Instruction from Teachers College, Columbia University. A parent herself, Caitlin provides parents with guidance that stems from shared experience. Her knowledge of the admissions process, the wide variety of Nursery and Kindergarten programs in the New York City area, along with her teaching expertise guides clients to find best-fit schools for their families and children.

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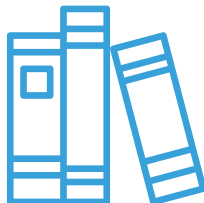
This book provides insight into how to prepare your child for the private kindergarten admissions process.

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# Preparing for the Kindergarten Admissions Process

As a parent, embarking on the Kindergarten admissions process can be both exciting and daunting. New York City offers a wide array of school choices, and identifying and gaining admission to a school that is the best fit for your child and family will set your child up for success for many years to come.

There is much to anticipate and plan for throughout the admissions season; narrowing down the list of schools, writing essays, attending open houses and information sessions, and putting your best foot forward in interviews are all just a part of the overall process. Presenting your family in the best light possible is imperative so schools can get to know whom they will admit into their community.

Preparing your child for this process can also feel overwhelming. Asking 4- and 5- year old children to meet with unknown adults in new school settings can be intimidating in a normal year; in light of restrictions due to COVID-19, we are asking even more of these young learners as they navigate assessments on Zoom as well.

As a School Placement Advisor and educator of ten years with many years of classroom experience, I will share tips and ideas to help you prepare your child for the Kindergarten admissions process in a developmentally appropriate way. I will also share how Evolved Education Company can support you and your child throughout this process so that you feel confident and excited as you embark upon this journey.

# Types of Assessments for the 2021-2022 Admissions Season

Due to COVID-19, schools have created solutions to keep children safe. While schools are unable to meet children in person, they are nonetheless very interested in learning about your child to ensure that they will be a good fit for their school community and will be successful in their academic program.

As you apply to several schools, you may encounter various assessments used. I will outline two formal assessments used by multiple schools, specifically the Thinking and Engagement Assessment and First Look Insights. Additionally, I share information about what schools may ask of your child when they meet with them on Zoom.



# Thinking and Engagement Assessment (T&E)

## What is the T&E?

A group of New York City independent schools adopted the use of the Thinking & Engagement Assessment, or T&E, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than inviting students into schools for playgroup assessments, the T&E is a child-friendly, Zoom-based assessment created by two Admissions directors with many years of experience. The T&E allows for a student to be assessed on Zoom once, and the results are shared with schools to which the child has applied that accept the T&E assessment, much like a common application. The T&E will be used for the 2021-2022 school year.

## How is the T&E administered?

The T&E is administered using Zoom technology on a computer or tablet at the child's home. The child should be sitting in a chair at a table or desk and they are required to wear headphones throughout the assessment. A parent or adult must be present in the room to greet the assessor with their child, and then must sit behind and to the side of the child so the assessor can see the adult throughout the assessment. The adult must wear headphones of their own and engage in their own quiet activity. Providing answers to the child or recording the session is prohibited. The assessor (an early childhood professional) will engage the child in a variety of child-friendly activities on the screen, and will elicit responses from the child. The entire assessment will take about 45 minutes.

### **What does the T&E assess?**

The T&E assesses areas of key importance for Kindergarten readiness, such as expressive and receptive language, pre-math and literacy skills, problem-solving, verbal and non-verbal reasoning, and teachability and engagement. All of the activities are designed to be administered on Zoom and are developmentally appropriate.

### **Will I get a copy of my child's results?**

The assessor will write up a detailed report of your child's assessment that will be shared with participating schools to which your child is applying. Parents will not receive a copy of their child's results. This is a replacement for an on-campus playgroup visit, and as such schools do not release a report of their assessment.

### **How do I sign my child up?**

Once you have submitted a completed application to one of the participating schools, you will receive a link to register your child for the T&E. Ensure that you only register your child once. After registering, you will receive instructions to schedule a date and time. Appointments for the T&E may be made from September 9, 2021, to December 1, 2021, and will be available seven days a week.

### **What is the cost?**

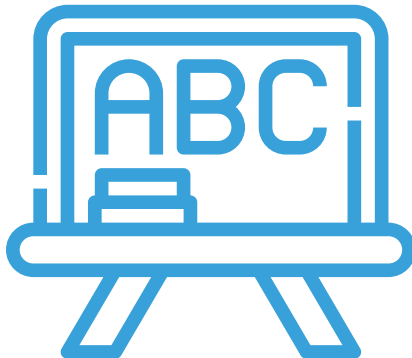
The fee for the T&E Assessment is \$300. The fee will be waived if you meet the following two criteria:

- 1. You are applying for financial assistance.
- 2. You have a total household income of less than \$150,000.



## What schools are participating in the T&E assessment for 2021-2022?

The Allen-Stevenson School  
The Birch Wathen Lenox School  
The Brearley School  
The Browning School  
The Buckley School  
The Cathedral School of St. John the Divine  
The Chapin School  
Collegiate School  
Convent of the Sacred Heart  
The Dalton School  
Early Steps--Partnering Organization  
The Elisabeth Morrow School  
The IDEAL School of Manhattan  
The Nightingale-Bamford School  
The Spence School  
Speyer School  
St. Luke's School  
St. Bernard's School  
Trevor Day School  
Trinity School



# First Look Insights Assessment (FLI)

## **What is First Look Insights?**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Horace Mann School and Riverdale Country School requested that First Look Insights, LLC (“FLI”) administer an online assessment to those applying to Kindergarten or First Grade in place of playgroup assessments on campus. The FLI assessment will be used for the 2021-2022 school year.

## **How is First Look Insights administered?**

The FLI is administered to a child through a secure web-based platform using a computer or tablet. The child is required to wear headphones throughout the assessment, and an adult must be present throughout, although they may not provide answers or record the session. The trained administrator (an early childhood expert) will greet the child and guide them through a short tutorial before beginning the assessment. Additional details are provided after registration is complete.

## **What does FLI assess?**

The FLI is a content aptitude test that assesses developmentally appropriate academic skills for children applying to Kindergarten. Topics may include number and letter recognition, simple operations, patterns, shapes, letter sounds, rhyming, and word recognition.

### **Will I get a copy of my child's results?**

The results of the FLI will be shared with the caregiver who registered the child for the exam. The caregiver will receive an electronic copy of the report, which will provide information on how the student performed in terms of the number of correct and incorrect responses.

### **How do I sign my child up?**

You can register your child online via <https://firstlookinsightsregistrationpage.as.me/schedule.php>

### **What is the cost?**

The cost for the FLI is \$50 for those applying to Kindergarten at Horace Mann and/or Riverdale, and \$150 for those applying to First Grade at Horace Mann.

### **What schools are participating in the FLI assessment for 2021-2022?**

Horace Mann School  
Riverdale Country School



# Individual School Assessments

In addition to the Thinking and Engagement and First Look Insight assessments, many schools will also schedule an individual assessment with your child. This will vary from school to school, but this assessment will allow admissions officers at each school to get to know your child as a learner in a one-on-one setting.

## What can I expect for my child's school assessment?

Schools will conduct these assessments via Zoom. Your child will be expected to come to the screen and interact with a member of the school's admission team for about 30 to 45 minutes.

## What kind of activities will my child complete?

The activities will vary from school to school, but some skills that may be assessed include:

- Expressive and receptive language skills
- Listening to a read aloud and responding to comprehension questions
- Drawing and labeling a self-portrait or picture of their family
- Participating in a verbal reasoning activity
- Copying a picture shown on the screen
- Naming shapes
- Identifying and completing patterns
- Identifying or producing rhymes
- Phonemic awareness skills
- Answering general "fund of knowledge" questions such as:
  - What is your name?
  - How old are you?
  - When is your birthday?
  - Where do you live?
  - Where do you go to school?
  - Who is in your family?
  - What is your favorite \_\_\_\_\_? (book, toy, color, animal, etc.)

# Ways Parents Can Talk to Their Children About the Process

It is important that parents talk to their children about the Kindergarten process and the assessments they will take in a developmentally appropriate way. While parents may feel some anxiety and worry about the process, it is in the child's best interest not to share or impart these feelings to them. Young children are most likely to be successful when these events or activities are framed in a positive way.

Here are some tips and ideas to help you talk to your child about the admissions process:

- Frame everything in the positive. You can talk about how it is exciting that your child will go to Kindergarten next year, and right now we are getting ready for them to be successful in this new adventure. "You get to show what you know!"
- If your child expresses any anxiety or sadness about leaving their current nursery school, acknowledge their feelings. It is normal and understandable that they would be sad to leave a school in which they feel comfortable, and that going to a new school with "bigger" kids may feel intimidating.
- Do not add any pressure to this process by talking to your children about getting into a particular school or putting too much emphasis on the online assessment. It is a parent's role to interface with schools and identify those that may be the best fit. In addition, parents should prepare their child as much as possible by practicing and providing opportunities to succeed; it is not a child's job to "perform."
- Talk to your child about the school that they will be attending AFTER the decision has been made. Introducing a variety of school options without any certainty of attending may be confusing or anxiety-inducing for a young child.
- Talk to your child about practicing Zoom skills in advance of the online assessment. Allow your child to be comfortable using a computer or tablet, as well as interacting with an adult on Zoom independently.
- Engage with a school placement advisor or student preparation specialist to support you and your child throughout this process.

# Tips and Ideas for Preparing Your Child for "Evaluation Day"

## 2 Months Before:

- Begin having your child use Zoom with parent or caregiver assistance so they can become familiar with the basic tools available. You can Zoom with family members, friends, etc. to make it fun and engaging!
- At this stage, you do not need to tell your child that they are doing this to prepare for Kindergarten. Frame this positively and say you are helping them learn a new skill.
- Introduce basic skills such as mute/unmute, view, end meeting, and what the screen will look like when someone else shares their screen with them.
- Introduce basic Zoom etiquette, such as keeping your face on the screen, sitting in a chair, wearing headphones, keeping the computer or tablet on a flat surface, not eating on screen, etc.
- Read to your child and begin asking comprehension questions, encouraging your child to elaborate on their answers.
- Embed basic math and literacy activities into your daily activities and routines.
- If it would be helpful for your child, work with a tutor or preparation specialist so they can practice these skills while working with a new adult. In addition, a tutor can practice specific skills that will be assessed.

## 2 Weeks Before:

- Let your child know that they will soon have the opportunity to work with a new teacher on Zoom. When they work with the teacher, they will be able to do some activities and play games together.
- Continue practicing basic Zoom skills and etiquette. Take note if your child is having trouble with any of these skills, and spend some additional time practicing. Perhaps turn it into a game or provide positive reinforcement when your child demonstrates the appropriate behavior.

## 2 Weeks Before (continued):

- While your child participates in Zoom activities with another adult, allow your child to become more independent while you work on your own quiet activity in the same room with headphones on. This will mimic the assessment environment, as parents are asked to sit nearby with headphones on, and should not interact with the child unless the assessor signals to the child that they should ask for technological assistance.
- It is not recommended that you put a great deal of pressure on the assessment this far in advance. Continue to talk about it positively so your child does not become anxious or worried.
- Encourage your child to elaborate on their responses to comprehension questions or explain their thinking.
- Continue to work with a tutor or preparation specialist on targeted behaviors or skills.

## 2 Days Before:

- Remind your child that they will be working with a new teacher on Zoom in two days, and they will be able to do some fun activities and play games together. Remind them of the basic Zoom etiquette skills you have been practicing.
- Let your child know that when they work with a teacher, the teacher wants to see all of the things they have been learning in school. They should do their best to answer the questions the teacher asks. They can "show what they know!"

## 20 Minutes Before:

- Let your child know that today is the day they will be meeting with a teacher on Zoom. Remind them of the fun activities they will be doing together, and get your child excited about it!
- Set your child up in a quiet space for the assessment so they will not be disrupted by other family members, pets, other electronic devices, etc.
- When it is time for the assessment, help your child sit at a desk or table with their headphones on. An adult should join the child on the screen to greet the assessor, and then the adult will be asked to sit nearby with their own activity with headphones on so as to not disrupt the assessment. Model for your child how you can focus on your own independent activity while they complete the assessment.

# Handling A Disappointing Performance

It can be challenging for any parent to sit back while your child participates in an important assessment. While the best way to set your child up for success for this type of evaluation is to practice and prepare in advance, young children may behave unpredictably when they are in new situations with unknown adults. It can be especially difficult not to intervene when you note your child is not working up to their full potential, either behaviorally or academically.

It is important for parents to remember that the online assessment is just ONE part of the application process for Kindergarten. Schools understand that asking 4- and 5- year old children to participate in online activities with a new adult is an unusual task. Much like when children participated in in-person evaluations, schools note that the behavior they observe in playgroups with unknown adults in a new setting may not demonstrate the full picture of your child. Schools will continue to look at your child's file as a whole, and they will take note of discrepancies between the online assessment and the teacher recommendation and school transcripts. Further, they may often follow up on any questions they have with your child's preschool director. You can discuss your child's performance with your preschool director so they are aware, and they can then advocate for your child when interfacing with ongoing schools.

In addition, when dialoguing with schools, parents can also be open and honest with admissions staff about their child's unique challenges. Schools appreciate when parents are willing to talk about areas of both strength and challenge for their child, including performance on the online assessment portion. Finally, this is something we can talk about during school placement consultations, should that be helpful to you.



# Activities to Prepare your Child at Home

## Social-Emotional Skills

- Allow your child to play with peers in one-on-one and small group settings.
- Provide opportunities for cooperative play by modeling how to share, compromise, and take turns independently.
- Name emotions and allow your child to express how they are feeling if they are upset or frustrated.
- Encourage your child to follow directions the first time they are given. Provide clear and firm boundaries.

## Learning Skills

- Allow your child to use materials creatively and inventively. Use everyday objects around your home and allow your child to explore and play.
- Support your child's individual interests and passions.
- Provide opportunities for your child to solve problems independently, such as zipping up their own coat, cleaning up after lunch, etc. If your child becomes frustrated, talk through strategies or encourage them to persist before jumping in to help.

## Receptive and Expressive Language

- Encourage your child to speak in complete sentences when responding to questions.
- Engage your child in tasks that require two or three step actions such as, "Please pick out your breakfast cereal and pour it in your bowl. Then you can add milk."
- Begin to gently correct age-appropriate errors in syntax or speech.
- Encourage your child to participate appropriately in conversation and discussion (allowing others to have turns to speak, discouraging interrupting, asking and answering questions about what others have said, etc.)
- Ask your child to recount an event or retell a story in order.

## Literacy and Math Activities

- Count everyday objects (toys, food, etc.) and compare groups (more/less/equal). Ensure your child is counting with a one-to-one correspondence.
- Discuss basic addition and subtraction concepts (If you have 4 apple slices and you eat 1, how many do you have left?)
- Estimate larger groups of objects, such as candies in a jar.
- Create patterns with household objects. Ask your child to extend the pattern, or notice which piece could be missing from the middle of the pattern.
- Sort toys or other items by size, color, etc.
- Notice and name shapes in your home or when walking outside.
- Notice and identify numbers 0-20 at home and outdoors. Encourage your child to discover that numbers are all around.
- Allow your child to complete puzzles independently.
- Recognize and produce rhyming words. Encourage your child to notice words that rhyme, and come up with additional rhyming words.
- Recognize both uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Connect sounds to letters by discussing objects you see all around (I spy something that begins with F. Can you find it? What else do you know that begins with F?)

## Read to your child daily and ask comprehension questions

- What do you see in this picture?
- Can you point to the biggest animal on the page?
- What was the problem in the story?
- How did the characters fix the problem?
- What do you think will happen next?
- Can you retell what happened in the story? What happened at the beginning, middle, and end?

## Fine and Gross Motor Skills

- Ensure your child has established either right or left-hand dominance.
- Practice your child's pencil grip. Talk to your child's teacher to ensure this is developing appropriately.
- Allow your child to practice and use tools for cutting, pasting, drawing, and writing.
- Practice fine motor skills by picking up small objects, using Legos, practicing buttoning and unbuttoning, opening and closing jars, stringing small beads, playing with play dough, etc.
- Take note of your child's spatial awareness and gross motor control.
- Have your child practice sitting in a chair or sitting criss-cross with good posture while engaged with an activity.

**At Evolved Education Company, we provide assessments that provide information about how your child is performing in various developmental areas such as language, motor, social-emotional, and pre-academic skills. We customize your child's preparation for both assessments and their Kindergarten experience.**



# School Placement Advisement

At Evolved Education Company, we work with families to identify and apply to best-fit schools for their children. We get to know your child and their individual learning profile, and also work with parents to understand their educational philosophy and goals for their child. From there, we create a list of schools that will be the best overall match for the child and family.

We guide and support families throughout the entire admissions process, including:

- Preparing your child for the T&E, FLI, and other school assessments
- Parent interview preparation
- Polishing and editing parent writing specific to each school
- Learning about the array of school choices
- Ensuring all deadlines are met for every school
- Saving time and eliminating inefficiencies

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For more information about Evolved Education Company, or to get started with your school placement advisement today, be in touch.

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