



## The Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Paterson

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# Understanding Your Child's Scores from the COOPERATIVE ADMISSIONS EXAMINATION

## What is the purpose of the Examination?

The students who apply for admission to Catholic High Schools in the Diocese of Paterson come from many, many different schools. In many cases, the schools use different standardized tests, which can be difficult to compare. Each school also has its own grading standards, as well as differences in what is taught. By having all applicants take the same test, high schools can get a better idea of how each applicant compares with every other applicant in their level of achievement. Schools also use the results of the examination to help in making course placement decisions for students entering ninth grade. High schools do not base their admission decisions only on the examination results: it is only one factor that is considered.

## The Subject Areas Tested

The examination that your child took contained seven different parts, or subtests. These parts were: Sequences, Analogies, Quantitative Reasoning and Verbal Reasoning (which are combined into the Total Ability Score,) and Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics (which are combined into the Total Achievement Score.) The Total Achievement and Total Ability Scores are combined into the Total Battery Score. The Cooperative Admissions Examination reflects the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards. The individual parts of the test are explained below.

### *Test 1 Sequences*

This test measures the student's ability to comprehend a rule or principle implicit in a pattern or sequence of figures, letters, or numbers. The student must analyze the pattern established in a row of figures, letters, or numbers, and then select the answer choice that would continue or complete the pattern. Items involve recognition of spatial relationships, ordered patterns, progressions, and combinations of parts to form a whole.

***Test 2 Analogies***

This test measures the student's ability to discern various types of relationships among picture pairs and then to infer parallel relationships between incomplete picture pairs. The pictures comprise scenes, people, animals, objects, or abstract graphic symbols. In each item, the student must recognize the nature of the relationship between two pictures and then, given a third picture, find an answer choice to accompany it that will produce a relationship that is parallel to that of the first two pictures.

***Test 3 Quantitative Reasoning***

This test measures aptitude for thinking with numbers. Quantitative reasoning item formats were developed to be dissimilar to most mathematics achievement test formats and therefore require the student to apply quantitative aptitude rather than learned skills.

***Test 4 Verbal Reasoning—Words***

This test measures the student's ability to solve verbal problems by reasoning deductively, analyzing category attributes, and discerning relationships and patterns. This measure of verbal ability contains several item formats. Some of the items require the student to identify essential elements of objects or concepts, and other items require the student to classify according to common attributes. Another item type requires the student to infer relationships between separate but related sets of words.

***Test 5 Verbal Reasoning—Context***

This test measures the student's ability to solve verbal problems by reasoning deductively. These verbal problems require the student to identify essential elements of concepts presented in short passages and draw logical conclusions. This measure of verbal ability contains one item format.

***Test 6 Reading and Language Arts***

This test measures understanding of reading comprehension, language expression, and vocabulary. Reading comprehension items focus on the central meaning of a passage rather than on surface details. Language items assess the student's ability to understand the structure of words, how words work together to form sentences, how sentences and paragraphs come together to convey ideas, and how language conventions (such as punctuation and capitalization) combine with these structures to clarify and impart meaning. The test also covers aspects of the writing process such as topic selection, editing, and proofreading.

***Test 7 Mathematics***

This test measures understanding of mathematics concepts. Specific skills include number relations, computation, estimation, operation concepts, measurement, geometry and spatial sense, data analysis, probability, patterns, functions, and reasoning.

## What is the meaning of the different scores?

Like other tests of this kind, the scores are initially based on the number of right answers. There was no penalty for "guessing." The score report, however, does not show the actual number of questions that your child answered correctly for each part of the test. Instead, the number right is used to **derive** other scores.

The number of questions answered correctly is transformed into two different types of scores: **Scale Scores** and **Percentiles**. It is important to understand that tests of this kind are not "graded" in the same way as the tests that your child takes normally in school. Usually, tests that teachers make up are graded by figuring the percentage of questions answered correctly, and then giving a grade based on this percentage. Tests like the Cooperative Admissions Examination, on the other hand, are scored differently. The number of questions that your child answered correctly is first used to generate the **Scale Score (SS)**.

**Scale Scores** are obtained by relating the average number of questions answered correctly by a group of students with the typical spread of the groups scores above and below the average score. **Scale Scores** describe the growth in achievement that occurs as a student passes through the grades in school. The higher the grade level, the higher the expected scale score. In Reading, for example, a student might be expected to have a scale score of 753 at the beginning of grade 8, and 765 by the start of grade 9.

You should not compare the **Scale Scores** your child received on different parts of the test in the same year. This is because the range of scores is different for each test section. For example, a Scale Score of 820 in Language does not reflect the same level of performance as a Scale Score of 820 in Mathematics.

Your child's scale score is then compared to the scale scores of a similar group of students who took the same test. Your child's score is then reported to you as a comparison with this group, or a **Percentile**. A **Percentile** tells you the percentage of students in the comparison group who lower scale score. For example, if your child had a scale score in Reading of 769 at the start of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we would look at a chart that tells us that 70% of the 8th grade students across the country who took the same test at the start of 8<sup>th</sup> grade had a scale score lower than 769. Therefore, your child's percentile score for Reading is 70. Percentile scores can range from a low of 1 to a maximum of 99.

Percentile scores lower than 23 are considered "Below Average", and scores higher than 77 are considered "Above Average". Scores between 23 and 77 are considered in the "Average" range.

The **total battery score** is a weighted average of the total ability scale score and the total achievement scale score (the total achievement is a weighted average of the reading, language, and math scale scores). It is calculated only if both total battery scores are present.

# The Differences Between the Percentile Scores

One area of concern and question that parents often have as they look at the score report is the difference they note between the **National Percentile (NP)** scores and the **Local Percentile (LP)** scores. Remember that tests of this type show scores that compare your child to one or more specific reference groups. The enclosed score report compares your child's performance to two distinct groups. The National Percentile compares your child's performance on the test to that of other 8th grade students across the country. The Local Percentile indicates his/her performance in comparison to other students who have applied for admission to any of the Catholic High Schools in the Diocese of Paterson and the Archdiocese of Newark. In almost all cases, the percentile score a student receives in comparison to the local group is lower than his/her National Percentile score. This difference results from the fact that by and large the students who apply for admission to Catholic High Schools are a very academically able group who tend to answer significantly more questions correctly on each part of the test.

The **national percentile (NP)** represents the percentage of students in the norm group whose scores fall below a given student's scale score. For example, a student whose NP is 65 scored higher than 65 percent of the students in the norm group. The 50th percentile represents the "national average" at the time of the norming: half of the norming sample scored above this point and half below.

The **local percentile (LP)** is based on a specific population taking the COOP entrance examination. The Archdiocese of Newark and the Diocese of Paterson compose one population. LP scores for students in one population cannot be compared with those for students in another population. However, the NP can be compared across populations.

The difference between **national percentile** and **local percentile** reflects the difference in the national normed sample and a population taking this year's COOP exam. Typically, a population that takes the COOP exam is higher achieving than the national sample for the national norms; therefore the LP will tend to be lower because the student is being compared to a generally higher-scoring population. Keep in mind that when a local percentile is reported, half of the students will score below the 50th percentile, since the students within the local group are being compared only with each other.

An example would be the following student scores:

Reading NP	93
Reading LP	88

This student scored higher than 93% of the national sample, but scored higher than only 88% of his or her COOP population.

So why are these different scores used? In the admission process, high schools may use the National Percentile Scores, along with your child's grades, to make an admission decision. The Local Percentile, which shows your child's performance relative to students similar to his/her future Catholic High School classmates, is used later in the process to assist in making course placement decisions for 9th grade.

In general, then, you should look at **National** percentiles to decide how well your child is progressing in developing a strong academic foundation for the future. The **Local** percentiles are useful for comparing your child's basic academic skills with those of the other students who will be his/her classmates in 9th grade.

