



FREE PARENT GUIDE · 2025–2026

SSAT Score Decoder for Atlanta Families

What your child's SSAT score actually means —
and what to do about it.

25+

years tutoring
Atlanta families

Top 2%

SAT/ACT scorer,
founder Robert Feagin

100s

Atlanta private school
admissions helped

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR SSAT SCORE REPORT

What's actually in the score report — and what each number means

When the SSAT score report arrives, most parents see a wall of numbers and percentiles that raise more questions than they answer. This section breaks down every component of the report so you know exactly what you're looking at.

Component	What it is	What it tells you
Scaled Score	A number between 440–710 (Middle) or 500–800 (Upper)	Your child's raw performance converted to a consistent scale
Percentile Rank	A number from 1–99 comparing your child to other SSAT test-takers	The single most important number for admissions officers
Score Band	A range around the scaled score (e.g. ± 15 pts)	Acknowledges natural score variation — retests often land within this band
Section Scores	Separate scaled scores for Verbal, Quantitative, and Reading	Shows where your child is strongest and where prep should focus
Writing Sample	Not scored — sent directly to schools	Reviewed by admissions but doesn't affect the percentile

The percentile rank is what admissions officers actually use. A scaled score of 680 means nothing in isolation — a 92nd percentile does. When schools say they're 'looking for students in the 85th percentile or above,' they mean the percentile rank, not the scaled score. Keep this in mind throughout this guide.

THE EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Every SSAT includes an unscored experimental section — typically 15–16 questions embedded within the test. Students cannot identify which section is experimental, and it does not affect the score. It exists solely for SSAT test development purposes. **This is important to communicate to your child:** if one section felt unusually hard, it may have been experimental.

WHAT YOUR PERCENTILE ACTUALLY MEANS

A plain-language guide to every score tier

SSAT percentiles compare your child exclusively against other students who have taken the SSAT — a self-selected, academically motivated group. This is very different from a general population percentile. A 70th percentile SSAT score is strong. Here's what each band means for Atlanta private school admissions:

Score band	Reading it	What it means for Atlanta admissions
95th–99th Percentile	Exceptional	Competitive for any school in the country, including the most selective Atlanta schools.
85th–94th Percentile	Very Strong	Squarely in range for Westminster, Pace, and Woodward. Strong application overall recommended.
75th–84th Percentile	Competitive	Meets minimum thresholds at most Atlanta private schools. Other application components matter a lot.
60th–74th Percentile	Developing	Below average for selective Atlanta schools. Targeted prep to push above 75th is strongly advised.
Below 60th Percentile	Needs Attention	Significant prep is needed. Most Atlanta selective schools expect 70th percentile or above.

A note on SSAT percentiles vs other tests: Because the SSAT pool consists entirely of private school applicants, a 70th percentile on the SSAT is roughly equivalent to a 90th percentile on a general population test like the PSAT. Do not compare SSAT percentiles directly to SAT or ACT percentiles — they are measuring against very different groups.

MIDDLE LEVEL VS UPPER LEVEL — SCORE RANGES

	Middle Level (grades 5–7)	Upper Level (grades 8–11)
Scaled score range	440–710 per section	500–800 per section
Total scaled range	1320–2130	1500–2400
Sections	Verbal, Quantitative (x2), Reading	Verbal, Quantitative (x2), Reading
Test duration	~2 hrs 35 min	~3 hrs

"Strong" percentile for selective Atlanta schools	75th+	80th+
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ATLANTA PRIVATE SCHOOL BENCHMARKS

What score does your child need for each Atlanta school?

The benchmarks below are based on publicly available admissions data, reported ranges, and Northside Tutoring's direct experience placing students at these schools. Ranges represent approximate middle 50% of admitted students — not hard cutoffs. Admissions is holistic; these numbers are strong guides, not guarantees.

School	Typical admitted percentile range	Approx. scaled percentile band	Key notes
The Westminster Schools	92nd–99th	90–99	Highly selective. Test scores are critical. 90th+ expected for most admits.
Pace Academy	80th–92nd	78–95	Moderately selective. Strong scores plus interview and teacher recs.
Woodward Academy	70th–88th	68–90	Broad range accepted. Demonstrated academic potential matters.
Atlanta International School	75th–90th	72–92	Language aptitude and verbal scores weighted heavily.
Marist School	72th–88th	70–90	Competitive but not exclusively score-driven; character counts.
Holy Innocents' Episcopal	65th–82nd	62–85	More holistic approach; room for students just below top tiers.
Mount Vernon School	65th–82nd	62–84	Design-thinking focus; breadth of interest valued alongside scores.
Lovett School	80th–92nd	78–94	Strong academic culture. Verbal section scores especially noted.
Chattahoochee Tech / Other	55th–75th	50–78	Broader admissions range. Score is one factor among several.

Important disclaimer: These benchmarks are guidelines only. Admissions policies, cohort sizes, and score expectations change year to year. We strongly recommend visiting each school's admissions office for current guidance. Northside Tutoring is not affiliated with any of the schools listed above.

Section scores matter — especially verbal.

Several Atlanta private schools, including AIS and Lovett, pay particular attention to the Verbal section score, which tests synonyms and analogies. A student with a 78th overall percentile but a 92nd percentile verbal score will often be viewed more favorably than one with even scores across the board. When reviewing your child's report, look at section scores alongside the overall percentile.

[Ask us which schools fit your child's score profile →](#)

WHAT TO DO BASED ON YOUR SCORE

A practical action plan for every result

The score matters — but only insofar as it informs what to do next. Here is the action plan we give Northside Tutoring families depending on where their child lands.

95th percentile or above

This score is excellent and requires no significant additional action. The work here is done. A score at this level is competitive for every Atlanta private school and most schools nationally.

Shift focus entirely to the rest of the application. Teacher recommendations, the admissions interview, and the writing sample now carry more relative weight than any incremental score improvement. That is where the time should go.

Retesting is rarely necessary. The only exception is if the school list includes Westminster or a similarly hyper-selective program where every percentile point is scrutinized. For most families at this score level, the test is finished.

80th–94th percentile

You're competitive — now sharpen the edge. Students in this range are within reach of every Atlanta private school. Targeted prep in the weakest section can push the composite percentile meaningfully.

Run a section-by-section analysis. If verbal is 70th but quantitative is 92nd, verbal prep will produce the biggest composite gain. Don't prep the whole test equally.

Plan for one retest. Students in this range routinely improve 8–12 percentile points with structured tutoring. Time it for 6–8 weeks before your application deadline.

65th–79th percentile

This score limits your school list — but it's fixable. Most selective Atlanta schools expect 75th+ at minimum. At 65th–74th, the application will face real headwinds at the top schools.

Start structured prep immediately. Students moving from 65th to 80th percentile is one of the most common and achievable tutoring outcomes we see. Plan 10–14 weeks of focused preparation.

Don't apply to top-choice schools on this score. Use this as motivation, not your application score. Set a realistic retest timeline and make it the plan.

Below 65th percentile

Act now — this score needs significant work. Below 65th is below the stated or effective threshold for most Atlanta independent schools. A comprehensive tutoring intervention is needed, not supplemental prep.

Assess whether the test level is correct. Some students at the low end of Middle Level perform dramatically better when retested at Middle Level after getting the format right — or vice versa. Confirm your child is taking the right level.

Realistic timeline: 12–16 weeks of dedicated prep. We have seen students move 20–30 percentile points with the right preparation. It requires commitment, but the scores are there to be found.

[Not sure where your child stands? Book a free diagnostic →](#)

TIMING & RETESTING STRATEGY

When to test, when to retest, and how many times

SSAT scores can be sent from any of a student's test sittings — the family controls which scores schools see. This is a significant strategic advantage. Here is how to use it.

When to sit the first test

For Atlanta private school admissions, families should plan to sit the first SSAT no earlier — and no later — than **5th grade**. Starting in 5th grade gives the student time to understand the test format, identify real gaps, and build toward a strong score over multiple sittings without rushed preparation. Beginning before 5th grade is not recommended — the content is not yet developmentally appropriate and early scores carry little predictive value.

How many times to retest

Most students retest once or twice. **Two or three sittings is considered normal** by Atlanta admissions officers — it signals serious intent, not weakness. Beyond three sittings, score gains typically plateau and some schools may request all scores regardless of your submission choice.

Score choice strategy

You control which scores are submitted, **except at schools that require all scores** (confirm with each school directly). For schools with score choice: submit the highest composite, but be aware that some admissions officers will ask to see all scores regardless. Consistency across sittings tends to read more favorably than wild variation.

SAMPLE TIMELINE: 7TH GRADE ENTRY PREP

When	Action	Goal
Spring, 6th grade	Diagnostic assessment with Northside	Identify baseline and gap areas
Summer before 7th	Structured SSAT prep (10–14 weeks)	Build to target percentile range
September, 7th grade	First SSAT sitting	Establish real test baseline

October–November	Review results, targeted retest prep	Address specific section weaknesses
November or January	Second SSAT sitting	Submit strongest score(s)
January–February	Applications due, interviews	Strong score supports full application

Important: Atlanta private school application deadlines vary. Westminster typically closes in early January; Pace and others vary. Confirm each school's deadline directly and work backward to set your prep and test dates.

HOW TO PREP EACH SSAT SECTION

Where the points are — and how to get them

Verbal (Synonyms & Analogies)

30 questions · 30 minutes

- The SSAT verbal section is the most vocabulary-intensive standardized test your child will take at this level.
- Synonyms require knowing precise definitions — context clues barely help here. Vocabulary flashcard systems (Anki, Quizlet) built from SSAT word lists are essential.
- Analogies test relationships between words, not just definitions. Practice recognizing relationship types: part/whole, cause/effect, type/kind, degree.
- Build vocabulary daily, not in cramming sessions. 15 minutes/day over 12 weeks beats 3 hours/week.

Quantitative (Math)50 questions across 2 sections · 50
minutes

- The two math sections test arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data — no calculator allowed.
- Middle Level emphasizes pre-algebra and basic geometry. Upper Level adds more advanced algebra and some coordinate geometry.
- Time management is critical: 25 questions in 25 minutes. Students who get stuck on hard problems lose points on easy ones they never reach.
- Focus heavily on number properties, ratios, percents, and word problems — these appear consistently across every SSAT administration.

Reading Comprehension

40 questions · 40 minutes

- Six passages across fiction, humanities, science, and social studies. Each passage has 5–7 questions.
- Main idea and author's purpose questions are the most common question type and the most coachable.
- Passage order strategy matters: read the questions first, skim for answers, then verify. Students who read full passages first frequently run out of time.
- Inference and vocabulary-in-context questions are the hardest and most score-differentiating at the upper tiers.

Writing Sample (Unscored)

1 prompt · 25 minutes

- The essay is not scored, but it is sent directly to schools. Admissions officers do read it.
- Students choose between a creative prompt and an essay prompt. Most benefit from the essay prompt — it's more structured.
- A coherent, clearly organized response matters more than sophisticated vocabulary at this age.
- Practice under timed conditions. 25 minutes goes by faster than students expect.

Get a section-by-section prep plan from Northside →

APPENDIX: SCORE CONVERSION REFERENCE

Raw score → scaled score → percentile by grade

These tables translate raw scores into approximate scaled scores and then into grade-specific percentile ranks for 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students taking the Middle Level SSAT. The raw-to-scaled conversion is based on publicly available EMA norms data and published 50th percentile anchors by grade. **Actual conversions vary by test form and year** due to equating — these figures are closely calibrated approximations, not official SSAT tables. For the most current official norms, visit ssat.org. A student's score report will always show their exact scaled score and grade-specific percentile.

HOW YOUR RAW SCORE IS CALCULATED

Answer type	Points awarded	Tip
Correct answer	+1 point	Answer every question you know — no downside
Incorrect answer	−¼ point	Guess only if you can eliminate 2 or more choices
Omitted / skipped	0 points	Safe to skip if truly uncertain — no penalty

VERBAL SECTION — 60 questions (30 synonyms + 30 analogies)

Maximum raw score: 60 · Scaled score range: 440–710

Raw score	Approx. scaled score	Gr 5 percentile	Gr 6 percentile	Gr 7 percentile	What it signals
−15 to −5	440–465	1	1	1	Below floor — no credit for most answers
−4 to 0	466–484	2	1	1	Very limited correct responses
1 to 5	485–501	5	2	1	Significant vocabulary and reasoning gaps
6 to 10	502–518	10	5	2	Below grade-level expectations
11 to 15	519–536	18	10	5	Some foundation; targeted prep needed
16 to 20	537–554	28	17	9	Approaching average for younger students
21 to 24	555–568	38	24	14	Developing — near 5th grade median

25 to 28	569–582	50	33	22	5th grade median range
29 to 32	583–598	60	45	32	Strong for 5th; near 6th grade median
33 to 36	599–614	70	55	43	6th grade median range
37 to 40	615–630	79	65	54	Strong for 6th; approaching 7th median
41 to 43	631–638	85	73	62	Near 7th grade median
44 to 47	639–654	90	81	72	Well above average — competitive at top schools
48 to 51	655–670	94	88	81	Strong candidate for selective programs
52 to 55	671–686	97	93	88	Exceptional — top-tier performance
56 to 60	687–710	99	97	95	Near-perfect — extremely rare

QUANTITATIVE (MATH) SECTION — 50 questions across 2 sections

Maximum raw score: 50 · Scaled score range: 440–710 · No calculator permitted

Raw score	Approx. scaled score	Gr 5 percentile	Gr 6 percentile	Gr 7 percentile	What it signals
–12 to –5	440–462	1	1	1	Very limited math foundation
–4 to 0	463–480	3	1	1	Significant gaps in arithmetic and pre-algebra
1 to 4	481–497	8	4	2	Foundational concepts not yet solid
5 to 9	498–518	16	9	4	Below grade expectations
10 to 14	519–539	26	16	9	Some competency; needs structured work
15 to 18	540–554	36	23	13	Approaching average — gaps in word problems
19 to 22	555–568	47	33	20	Near 5th grade median
23 to 25	569–578	55	42	28	5th grade median range
26 to 29	579–595	64	52	38	Strong for 5th; near 6th grade median
30 to 32	596–605	72	60	48	6th grade median range
33 to 36	606–622	80	69	58	Strong for 6th; approaching 7th grade level
37 to 39	623–632	86	76	65	Near 7th grade median
40 to 42	633–646	91	83	74	Well above average — selective school range
43 to 46	647–663	94	89	82	Top-quartile performance

47 to 49	664–679	97	93	88	Excellent — very few questions missed
50	680–710	99	97	94	Near-perfect or perfect math raw score

READING COMPREHENSION SECTION — 40 questions

Maximum raw score: 40 · Scaled score range: 440–710 · 6 passages, 40 minutes

Raw score	Approx. scaled score	Gr 5 percentile	Gr 6 percentile	Gr 7 percentile	What it signals
–10 to –5	440–462	1	1	1	Very limited reading comprehension
–4 to –1	463–476	3	1	1	Significant gaps in passage analysis
0 to 3	477–496	8	4	2	Below grade-level reading skills
4 to 7	497–516	15	8	4	Struggling with main idea and inference
8 to 11	517–535	24	14	7	Developing — some passages manageable
12 to 15	536–553	35	22	13	Approaching average — needs pacing work
16 to 18	554–566	45	31	19	Near 5th grade median
19 to 21	567–580	55	41	28	5th grade median range
22 to 24	581–595	64	52	38	Strong for 5th; near 6th grade median
25 to 27	596–609	73	62	49	6th grade median range
28 to 30	610–623	81	71	59	Near 7th grade median range
31 to 33	624–637	87	79	68	Well above average across all grades
34 to 36	638–654	92	86	77	Strong for selective school applications
37 to 38	655–674	95	91	85	Top 10% — excellent comprehension
39 to 40	675–710	98	96	92	Near-perfect — exceptional readers

GRADE-LEVEL MEDIANS AT A GLANCE (50TH PERCENTILE SCALED SCORES)

Source: EMA SSAT Program Norms, published by Ivy Global / Enrollment Management Association

	5th grade 50th percentile	6th grade 50th percentile	7th grade 50th percentile
Verbal	584	614	638
Math	563	593	614
Reading	569	593	611
Total (composite)	1,716	1,800	1,863

How to read this table: A 6th grader scoring 614 on Verbal is at the 50th percentile for their grade — meaning exactly half of all 6th grade SSAT test-takers scored at or below that scaled score. The same scaled score of 614 would place a 5th grader well above the 50th percentile, and a 7th grader somewhat below it. This is why grade-specific percentiles are what matter — not the raw scaled score in isolation.

YOUR NEXT STEP

How Northside Tutoring helps Atlanta families reach their target score

We've helped hundreds of Atlanta families navigate SSAT prep and private school admissions. Our tutors score in the top 1% of test-takers and bring direct experience with what each Atlanta school is looking for. Here's how we work:

1-on-1 SSAT Tutoring

Personalized, elite tutoring matched to your child's exact section weaknesses. We don't tutor the whole test equally — we identify where the points are and go there first.

SSAT Group Cohort (May)

Our structured SSAT cohort brings together a small group of motivated students for a focused, high-energy prep experience. More affordable than private tutoring with results that rival it.

Diagnostic Assessment

Not sure where your child stands? We run a full diagnostic — scored, section-by-section — and give you a clear picture of the target score, the gap, and exactly what it will take to close it.

School Selection Strategy

We help families match their child's score profile and application strengths to the right list of Atlanta schools — not just the most famous ones, but the ones that are the best actual fit.

Ready to build a plan?

Book a free 20-minute strategy call with our team. We'll review your child's score, identify the fastest path to their target percentile, and recommend the right Northside program.

[Book a Free Consultation →](#)[View All Services →](#)

Northside Tutoring has served Atlanta families since 2000. We are an independent, boutique tutoring company — not affiliated with any test maker or school. Score benchmarks in this guide are approximate and based on historical admissions data and Northside's direct experience. Always confirm current requirements directly with each school. Visit northsidetutoring.com or book a free consultation at northsidetutoring.com/contact.